UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THE PHILADELPHIA THEATRE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THOMAS CLARK POLLOCK

A THESIS

IN ENGLISH

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PHILADELPHIA
1933

THE PHILADELPHIA THEATRE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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For the BENEFIT *of*

Mr. Lewis Hallam,

By a Company of COMEDIANS from

L O N D O N,

At the NEW THEATRE, *in* Water-ſtreet,

This preſent Evening (being the Twenty-ſeventh of *May*, 1754) will be preſented a COMEDY, called,

TUNBRIDGE WALKS:

OR,

The Yeoman of Kent.

The Part of *Woodcock* (the Yeoman of *Kent*) by Mr. *Malone*.

Reynard, *Loveworth*, } by { Mr. *Rigby*. Mr. *Miller*.

Captain *Squib*, by Mr. *Lewis Hallam*.

The Part of Mr. *Maiden*, by Mr. *Singleton*.

The Part of *Belinda*, by Mrs. *Beeeeley*.

Penelope, *Lucy*, Mrs. *Goodfellow*, } by { Mrs. *Clarkſon*. Miſs *Hallam*. Mrs. *Rigby*.

And the Part of *Hillaria*, to be perform'd by Mrs. *Hallam*.

To which will be added, a BALLAD OPERA, called,

The *COUNTRY WAKE*;

OR,

HOB in the WELL.

The Part of *Flora*, to be perform'd by Mrs. *Beeeeley*.

Sir *Thomas Teſty*, *Friendly*, Old *Hob*, *Dick*, } by { Mr. *Clarkſon*. Mr. *Adcock*. Mr. *Miller*. Maſter *L. Hallam*.

Hob's Mother, *Betty*, } by { Mrs. *Clarkſon*. Miſs *Hallam*.

And the Part of Young *Hob*, to be perform'd by Mr. *Hallam*.

Tickets to be had at Mrs. Bridges's, *in* Front-ſtreet, *and of Mr.* Hallam.

BOX 6s. PIT 4s. GALLERY 2s. 6d.

N. B. The Doors will be open'd at Five, and the Play to begin at Seven a Clock. *VIVAT REX.*

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Colonial Period, 1700–1775	3
II	An Interlude by Military Actors, 1776–1778	34
III	Prohibitions, the Old American Company and the New Theatre, 1779–1799	40

CHAPTER I

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

1700–1775

THOUGH the record of the Philadelphia stage during the eighteenth century is of course primarily important as a keystone chapter in American theatrical annals, it also contributes a fundamental document to the history of American culture. The theatre's long struggle to final triumph throws light on many significant features of American civilization. In addition to illustrating the growth of our artistic life and its social methods, the account of that struggle reveals our religious organizations as militant social forces; mirrors the changes in population; indicates our interrelations with European cultures; shows the individualism of the American spirit, with its opposing surge toward mass action; and also affords what in the twentieth century is of extraordinary interest—a complete chapter in the history of legislative prohibitions. And the early theatrical history of Philadelphia is especially important because during the eighteenth century the Philadelphia stage was, on the whole, the most important in America. New York,[1] still a stubborn Dutch town, was important, but not yet the theatrical heart of the country. Charleston,[1] as well as other cities along the coast, had a brilliant stage. But Philadelphia, especially toward the end of the century, was unquestionably the leader.

For the first half of the century, however, when the growing town was still small, the record of the Philadelphia stage is significantly meager. Though the Quakers and Germans were not the only people in town—an increasingly large group, chiefly Church of England, was more interested in the arts—the Quakers controlled Philadelphia and gave it its official tone. They consistently fought the stage. And though, after 1719, newspapers were published once a week, they were not interested in local news. Save for one small advertisement, the papers made no mention of

[1] See Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage,* Vols. I and II, and Willis, *The Charleston Stage in the Eighteenth Century,* for detailed accounts of the early theatre in New York and Charleston.

players in Philadelphia till 1750, more than a quarter of a century after comedians are known to have been patronized by the Governor of Pennsylvania. So the theatrical record of the first half of the period is meager and accidental, with its most obvious facts concerning opposition to stage-playing rather than the theatre itself.

FIRST FACTS

As early as 1700 [2] the Assembly of Pennsylvania passed a law prohibiting "stage-plays, masks, revels" and other "rude and riotous sports." The immediate reason for this law is not certain. It is possible that the Quakers simply wished to fence their Eden as a sober precaution against riotous and alluring serpents. Or perhaps they feared the approach of players who were (probably) then in Virginia and New York, perhaps even in Boston.[3] Or it is quite possible that someone, perhaps the Richard Hunter who had a license to act in New York about the turn of the century, was already acting in or near Philadelphia. At any rate, the Assembly passed a prohibitory law, and an interesting struggle with the British government followed. In 1705 the law was repealed in England. When the Assembly heard the news, it set about passing the law again—this time with the prohibition extended, perhaps significantly, to "interludes." The new law was vetoed in England in 1709. Again the Quaker Assembly, in 1711, enacted a prohibition. When that law was repealed, in 1713, the Friends gave up the struggle till 1759, when, though partially outwitted by a governor favorable to the actors, they passed another law, in turn quickly vetoed.[4]

Denied legal prohibition, Yearly Meeting in 1716 advised Friends against "going to or being in any way concerned in plays, games, lotteries, music, and dancing." [5]

But at least by 1723, professional actors, led by "a Player who had Strowled hither to act as a Comedian," came to Philadelphia, "chose for their Stage a place just without the verge of the City," published "printed

[2] For the source of this and all other statements concerning the Philadelphia stage which are not supported by footnotes, see the *Day Book* of *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century,* under the date mentioned.

[3] See Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage,* I, 3–9, for the earliest traces in other cities.

[4] For a fuller discussion of this subject, see W. S. Dye, "Pennsylvania versus the Theatre," *Pa. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.,* LX, 332–372 (Oct., 1931).

[5] Ezra Michener, *A Retrospect of Early Quakerism,* Phila., 1860, p. 361.

Bills," and went on "to act accordingly." James Logan, the Quaker mayor, wrote to a friend, "How grievous this proves to the sober people of the place, thou wilt easily judge, but it happens at p'sent to be more particularly so on me, having, unfortunately, been chosen Mayor of Philad[a] for this year, there is an expectation that I should exert that authority to suppress their acting. But as . . . ye Gov[r] [Sir William Keith] himself resorts thither, I can by no means think it advisable to embroil myself with the governour to no purpose"—especially as the governor had already "excused himself from prohibiting" the stage-playing.

The unhappy mayor's letter is, ironically, the only knowledge which has come to light of these "strowling" players, whose acting "just without the verge of the city" really opens our theatrical history. But it proves indubitably that there were professional *strolling players* in Philadelphia by 1723. And in the next year, 1724, a newspaper advertisement yields our first definite knowledge of a *theatre* in Philadelphia. It was "the New Booth on Society Hill." The single announcement tells of "Roap Dancing" and "your old friend Pickle Herring" [6]—possibly the leading comedian of 1723—who was in 1724 advertised for his "Comical Humour."

The "Roap Dancing" may be passed over, but the New Booth, the first theatre known in Philadelphia, is important. It was on Society Hill,[7] probably just to the south of the city limits, as two later theatres were to be, and across open fields from the built-up city. (Philadelphia in those days lay between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, and Vine Street and Cedar, now South Street. North of Vine were the Northern Liberties, and South of Cedar lay Southwark.) All we know of the theatre itself is that there were "performances on the stage," that the prices were "on the stage 3s., in pit 2s., in gallery 1s. 6d.," and that it was called "the New Booth on Society Hill." These facts are meager. But they prove that Philadelphia, having received strolling players in 1723, could at least by 1724 [8] boast of a theatre, the New Booth on Society Hill.

[6] Dr. Schelling has suggested that this may indicate a German influence, as "Pickle Herring" was a German, as well as an Elizabethan, clown.

[7] Very possibly it was identical with the theatre which must have been used in 1723; C. P. Keith, *Chronicles of Pa.,* II, 671, says that the theatre of 1723 was "just below South Street." But he states no authority, and we must rely on probability and imagination.

[8] Knowledge of this theatre was of course wanted by Miss Willis when she

Between 1724 and 1749, when we get the next glimpse of Philadelphia comedians, the most important "firsts" (passing over the "Lyon King of Beasts" and clock-work marvels) were of the first marionettes, in 1742, when "A merry Dialogue between Punch and Joan his wife . . . by changeable Figures of two Feet high" was given "At the Sign of the Coach-and-Horses, against the State House, in Chesnut-Street," and of Philadelphia's first "picture show," given by a "Magick Lanthorn" at Joseph Barber's "at the Temple Bar in Second-Street" in 1743.

MURRAY AND KEAN AND NANCY GEORGE

In August, 1749, a "Company of Comedians" was in Philadelphia, playing in a large warehouse owned by William Plumsted [9] in Water (or King) Street between Pine and Lombard. The newspapers did not mention the actors, but we know [10] that they gave *Cato* on August 22 or 23 and were still in the city in January, 1750, when the Common Council attempted to "discourage" them. In February they went to New York, and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* made history on March 6 by noting the arrival in the Dutch town of "a company of comedians from Philadelphia"—the first time that a Philadelphia newspaper had, save for one advertisement, mentioned the existence of actors in the Quaker city. The comedians played two seasons in New York, from March, 1750, to July, 1751.[11]

The origin of this company, led by Walter Murray and Thomas Kean, is unknown, but the hypothesis is tenable that it was composed in part of players from the West Indies who had come north to try

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wrote that "Philadelphia did not have a playhouse until 1749." *The Charleston Stage in the Eighteenth Century,* p. 7.

[9] Watson, *Annals of Phila.,* I, 101–2, testimony of Robert Venable.

[10] John Smith, son-in-law of James Logan, agent of William Penn, wrote in his manuscript diary, in the volume covering the period from Third month, 20th, 1749, to Tenth month, 19th, 1749:

"6 mo. [August] 22.3. Jos: Morris & I happened in at Peacock Biggers, & drank Tea there & his daughter being one of the Company who were going to hear the Tragedy of Cato acted it Occasioned some Conversation in w'ch I Expressed my sorrow that any thing of the kind was encouraged."

This quotation is furnished by Dr. A. C. Myers, who has had access to the privately owned manuscript.

[11] For this and other information as to their New York performances, see Odell, I, 32–43.

their fortunes, as David Douglass and the nucleus of the American Company were to do ten years later. We know that a theatrical troupe which had been in Jamaica in 1745 was broken up in 1749.[12] The company in Philadelphia was professional (Dunlap to the contrary), though it recruited new blood—we know that a Nancy George, called "Gouge" by a negro servant decades later,[13] joined the players, though "many fell out" with her for so doing. The name of this one actress, Nancy George, of one play, *Cato,* of the theatre, in Plumsted's warehouse, and the dates August 22/3, 1749, and January 8, 1750, are, with the newspaper notice in March, our only definite knowledge of this early season. However, we know the names of some of the actors and some of the plays given by the Murray and Kean company in New York, where the papers were more informative. The plays known to have been given there were *The Beaux' Stratagem, The Beggar's Opera, A Bold Stroke for a Wife, The Busy Body, Cato, The Committee, The Distrest Mother, The Fair Penitent, George Barnwell, Love for Love, The Orphan, The Recruiting Officer, Richard III, Sir Harry Wildair,* and *The Spanish Fryar.* The known actors were the managers, Walter Murray and Thomas Kean, and Nancy George, Jago, Mrs. Leigh, Mr. Marks, Mr. Moore, Master Dicky Murray, Mrs. ("Widow") and Miss Osborne, Mr. Scott, Mr. Taylor, John Tremaine, and Charles Somerset Woodham.

With the appearance of this, the first theatrical troupe in America of which we have any detailed knowledge, the curtain hiding Philadelphia's stage, which had shed a little gleam through the peephole in 1723 and 1724, began slowly to rise.

THE COMEDIANS FROM LONDON

By 1754, when Hallam's "Company of Comedians from London" came to Philadelphia, the curtain was well up. The story of this adventurous troupe has often been told.[14] It originated in London, in the imagination of William Hallam, an actor-manager, who organized and equipped for America a company headed by his brother and sister-

[12] Odell, I, 69.

[13] Watson, *op. cit.*

[14] See Dunlap, Chaps. I and II, for an early and somewhat romanticized account, and Odell, I, 50–57, for scholarly corrections.

in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Hallam, he himself staying in London. The company was organized on a joint-stock or "sharing" basis, each of the twelve actors having one of eighteen shares, Lewis Hallam having two more for his services as manager and the work of his three children, and the remaining four shares being "assigned to the property"—that is, to the Hallam brothers for the use of their capital. (The old sharing system, modified by the introduction of salaried actors, remained in force till 1794.) Before the company left England, a number of plays were *"cast* and *put in study"*: Dunlap [15] records *The Merchant of Venice, The Fair Penitent, The Beaux' Stratagem, Jane Shore, The Recruiting Officer, Richard III, The Careless Husband, The Constant Couple, Hamlet, Othello, Theodosius, The Provoked Husband, Tamerlane, The Inconstant, Woman's Riddle, The Suspicious Husband, The Conscious Lovers, George Barnwell,* and *The Twin Rivals,* with the farces of *Miss in her Teens, The Mock Doctor, The Devil to Pay, Hob in the Well, Damon and Phillida, The Anatomist,* and the pantomime, *Harlequin Collector.* Thus equipped, the comedians set sail for America in *The Charming Sally* and arrived at York River, Virginia, on June 28, 1752. They opened in Williamsburg with *The Merchant of Venice,* and after a short season there and "wanderings through the southern commonwealth," [16] played in New York from September, 1753, to March, 1754.

While in New York, Dunlap tells us, Mr. Hallam was visited by "several gentlemen from Philadelphia" who urged him to bring the company to the Quaker city, and "pledged themselves for the success notwithstanding any opposition from the followers of Penn." Hallam sent Malone, heavy tragedian, to Philadelphia, but Malone found the Quakers too much for him, and sent for the manager. On his arrival Hallam "found the city of brotherly love and passive peace divided into two hostile factions, as violent as the green and red of Constantinople." Petitions and counter-petitions were presented to Governor Hamilton, who "gave permission to open a theatre and cause twenty-four plays with their attendant afterpieces to be performed, on condition that they 'offered nothing indecent and immoral,' and performed one night for the benefit of the city"—after having given adequate security for debts.[17]

[15] Dunlap's source was the verbal testimony of Lewis Hallam the Younger.

[16] Odell, I, 55.

[17] Dunlap, 15–17. See also allusion by "Y. Z." in the *Pa. Gazette,* March 26,

The Comedians from London opened on April 15 with *The Fair Penitent* and *Miss in her Teens,* and played on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays till June 24, when the season closed with *The Provoked Husband* and the sprightly and popular *Miss in her Teens.* Governor Hamilton had granted "permission" for six additional nights,[18] so that in all, thirty performances were given, of which the newspapers and an extant playbill give record of only six, with five casts. It is interesting to note that of the six known plays of 1754, four were still being given in the city at the end of the century: *Tamerlane* appeared in 1795, *The Provoked Husband* in 1796, *The Fair Penitent* in 1798, and *The Gamester* in 1799; the pantomime, *Harlequin Collector,* was played in every Philadelphia season for the next fifteen years after 1754, the ballad-opera of *Flora, or Hob in the Well,* was still being given in 1796, and *Miss in her Teens* in the last year of the century.

The New Theatre in Water Street, at which the comedians appeared, was in William Plumsted's warehouse, which had housed the Murray and Kean players of 1749–50. This lofty building of "old-fashioned party-coloured or black glazed brick" [19] was fitted out with a gallery, pit, and stage, and was probably a much better theatre than the term "warehouse" would suggest; it was still standing in 1849. The company had brought new stage scenery and properties with it from England, "entirely new, extremely rich, and finished in the highest Taste." [20] A seat in the boxes cost six shillings, in the pit, four shillings, and in the gallery, two shillings sixpence. The performances began at seven o'clock, for the bills included a full-length play, an afterpiece of farce, pantomime, or ballad-opera, and often singing and dancing.

The leading actress, both in tragedy and comedy, was the "Queen-Mother" of the American stage, Mrs. Lewis Hallam (later Mrs.

1754, to the "express Conditions of the Permission lately granted." The fact that no record of the permission is to be found in *The Minutes of the Provincial Council, The Pennsylvania Archives,* or the *Votes of the Assembly* of this period has no significance, as there was no law against acting, and hence the governor's permission was simply a favorable gesture. For some hint of the bitter popular controversy, see, e. g., letters in the *Pa. Gaz.* for March 9 and 26, 1754. The verbal attacks on the stage in this early period were vitriolic.

[18] Durang, Series I, Chap. IX. The season included thirty-one playing nights, but no play was given on June 17.

[19] Durang, Series I, Chap. IV.

[20] P. L. Ford, *Washington and the Theatre,* p. 10, quoting the *Va. Gazette* of June 12, 1752.

David Douglass);[21] Rigby was the leading tragedian and light comedian, "a well bred professional man; and young [Lewis] Hallam [then a boy of fourteen playing servants] . . . said that he was indebted to Rigby for much valuable instruction in acting."[22] Malone was the heavy tragedian; Singleton, a light comedian; Mrs. Adcock played the walking ladies and smart chambermaids, "it is said with credit, and was a favorite";[22] Miss Hallam took the girls, and Mrs. Becceley was the soubrette.[23]

Only the imagination and the extremities of research can attempt anything like a full reconstruction of the audiences in this early season, but it must have been a brilliant crowd (winnowed of Quaker drabness) of those to whom the arts, the amusements, and the beauty of life were important. We can feel quite sure, for example, that in the audiences were William Plumsted, who furnished the theatre, Provost William Smith, young Francis Hopkinson—the teacher and student worked on a play at the College two years later—and Thomas Godfrey. One can risk being more exact, and say that Godfrey, the young poet who was to write *The Prince of Parthia* (the first American play to be produced professionally) for the actors when they returned in 1759, was probably at the theatre on June 10, and heard Clarkson, as Omar in *Tamerlane,* call Tamerlane a "petty prince of Parthia." The produc-

[21] As there is apt to be confusion among the various Hallams, it is wise to differentiate them. Lewis Hallam the Elder, manager in 1754, never returned to the city, while his son, Lewis Hallam the Younger, became a leading actor and manager, appearing in the city as late as 1794, and again in the nineteenth century. Another son, Adam, played in 1759 (and probably in 1754), but is not important. A Master Hallam, child of Lewis the Younger, appeared in 1767. He may have been but probably was not Marvin Hallam, also son of Lewis the Younger, who played in 1794.

The Mrs. Lewis Hallam of 1754 was the Mrs. David Douglass of 1759 and later. Her daughter, Miss Hallam (whom Seilhamer, I, 144, calls Helen—the Christian name does not appear in the published Williamsburg, New York, or Philadelphia casts) did not appear after 1754, unless she was (as is unlikely) the Miss Nancy Hallam whose name appears only in 1759. A niece of Mrs. Hallam-Douglass, Miss Sarah Hallam, was a leading actress from 1766 to 1773. Miss Tuke, whose name first appears in 1789, married Lewis Hallam the Younger, and played here as Mrs. Hallam in the fall of 1794. The dates refer to the Philadelphia stage.

[22] Durang, Series I, Chap. II.

[23] For a complete list of the known actors and plays of this and every other season in Philadelphia during the eighteenth century, see the *Day Book* under the last playing date of the season.

tion of *The Careless Husband* and *Harlequin Collector* on June 19 was for the benefit of the Charity School which was to grow into the University of Pennsylvania. "Upwards of an Hundred Pounds" [24] was received by the trustees, it would seem in opposition to the desires of those who wished to protect the hems of their garments from the stage-players. Many prologues and epilogues [25] which have survived (because the newspapers were apparently more interested in them than in the plays and players) bear eloquent testimony, both solemn and sprightly, to the opposition the theatre was encountering, and to the support given it by the friends of the drama.

A prologue written by Francis Hopkinson for the opening of the Theatre on Society Hill next season [26] is typical of the more quietly serious verse. In form it is sixteen conventionally rigid iambic pentameter couplets; in content it is a plea that the stage may be tolerated and enjoyed for its moral influence as a school of virtue:

A PROLOGUE

Spoken by Mr. LEWIS HALLAM, at the opening of a Theatre at Philadelphia.

To bid reviving virtue raise her head,
And far abroad her heav'nly influence shed;
The soul by bright examples to inspire,
And kindle in each breast celestial fire:
For injur'd innocence to waken fear;
For suff'ring virtue swell the gen'rous tear;
Vice to expose in each assum'd disguise,
And bid the mist to vanish from your eyes,
With keener passion, that you may detest
Her hellish form, howe'er like virtue drest:
The muse to cherish, genius to inspire,
Bid fancy stretch the wing, and wit take fire—
For these we come—for these erect our stage,
And show the manners of each clime and age:
For these we come—oh! may your smiles attend
The pleasing task, and all our toils befriend.
—Away ye senseless, ye whom nought can move,
Vice to abhor, or virtue to approve;

[24] MS Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the College of Philadelphia for August 13, 1754.

[25] See *Pa. Gazette,* April 25, June 27.

[26] June 25, 1759. See note 40 on page 16.

Whose souls could ne'er enjoy the thought sublime,
Whose ears ne'er taste the muses' flowing rhime.

But ye whose breasts the pow'rs of softness know,
Who long have learnt to feel another's woe;
Nor blush to heave the sympathetic sigh,
Or drop the pious tear from pity's eye;
Attend our work, and may you ever find
Something to please and to improve the mind:
That as each diff'rent flow'r that decks the field
Does to the bee mellifluous sweetness yield:
So may each scene some useful moral show;
From each performance sweet instruction flow.
Such is our aim—your kind assent we ask,
That once obtain'd, we glory in the task.

THE FIRST AMERICAN COLLEGE PLAY

The comedians left the city after June 24, 1754, but their influence remained. In January 1757, during the Christmas holidays, the students at the College of Philadelphia produced a number of times *The Masque of Alfred the Great,* altered for use in the College by that admirable teacher, Provost William Smith:[27] the first drama at least partly American which has survived. Part of the prologue was spoken by W. Hamilton; S. Chew finished the prologue and acted the Danish King; and Jacob Duché took the part of Alfred and recited the epilogue. There is good reason to believe that Francis Hopkinson accompanied the songs, at least one of which he wrote, on the harpsichord.[28]

From the point of view of stage history, perhaps the most interesting part of the production was the dramatized criticism of the then prevalent custom of reciting prologues and epilogues whose spirit clashed with the play. While the overture was being played, "W. Hamilton, *entering hastily and interrupting the music,* began to speak a comedy overture." He was just getting in good breath when "Mr. S. Chew . . . enters hastily in a Students Garb, and driving him off speaks the Remainder *," which was fittingly serious. The asterisk called attention to the point: " * As the whole Piece is grave and moral, these lines

[27] See Quinn, *History of the American Stage from the Beginning to the Civil War,* p. 52; and also his "The First American College Play," *General Magazine,* Vol. XXVIII, 313–316 (April, 1926), for more recent light. For the contemporary account see *Pa. Gazette,* Jan. 20, 27, and Feb. 3, 10, 1757.

[28] O. G. Sonneck, *Francis Hopkinson,* p. 40.

in the Beginning were only introduced to give us an opportunity of disapproving such lighter Strains as on such Occasions serve too commonly to wipe off the virtuous Impression, which the chaste and sober Drama would otherwise leave on the Mind." This might well be called the first serious criticism of the theatre published in Philadelphia. The play was very well received, the young gentlemen meeting with applause "from crouded and discerning Audiences, during the several Nights of its Representation."

After this ambitious beginning, the students at the College of Philadelphia frequently gave dialogues at Commencement, though evidently none was quite so ambitious as *The Masque of Alfred*. We have record of six dialogues in the 1760's, two in the '70's, and one in 1790.

DOUGLASS AND THE THEATRE ON SOCIETY HILL

The Comedians from London had gone to the West Indies after their Philadelphia season of 1754, where they found a number of other actors, including David Douglass and Owen Morris. Lewis Hallam the Elder died soon after, and his widow became Mrs. David Douglass. A new company was formed, which, headed by Douglass, who was to be the most important theatrical manager in colonial America, came to the northern colonies in 1758. In New York it met with dogged antagonism, but succeeded in being allowed to play for thirteen nights between December 28, 1758, and February 7, 1759.[29] Then the company came to Philadelphia, where it enjoyed a brilliant season of over six months, from June 25 to December 28, 1759, presenting about eighty plays (not counting afterpieces) of which we have record of twenty-eight, including five by Shakespeare.

David Douglass, the new manager, appears from all accounts to have been a man of real ability, handling the theatre, the actors, and the public in a difficult period with a skill which approached genius, especially when compared with the botch his stepson and some others made of a less difficult task after the Revolution. Alexander Graydon, who had no connection with the theatre, and cared for words, called him "rather a decent than a shining actor, a man of sense and discretion." [30] His wife, earlier Mrs. Hallam, was still the leading lady of the company (though in a few more years she was to yield most of her youthful rôles), and

[29] Odell, I, 76–78.
[30] *Memoirs of a Life*, 76.

his stepson, Lewis Hallam, no longer called "the Younger," had now become at nineteen the leading juvenile actor in America, attempting all but the most mature rôles. Mr. Harman took the heavy leads and a various line of other parts, sharing honors with Lewis Hallam, as the very capable Mrs. Harman—a granddaughter of Colley Cibber—did to a lesser degree with Mrs. Douglass. Owen Morris took many of Malone's rôles, especially in low comedy. For a long time he was the comic idol of the Southwark gods, and as "Old Morris" was still playing in Philadelphia at the close of the century. The company was small and doubling was frequent. The only important addition as the season went on was a Mr. Palmer, whose name appeared for the first time on December 1, when he played Macbeth. The curious likelihood is that he was John Palmer the Younger, who "from 1761 to 1798 . . . was on the London stage, one of the best general actors it ever had." [31] John Palmer "had a good figure and finely cut features, a careless and easy going elegance of bearing, and the sort of insinuating amiability that rings a trifle false." [32] Before his London advent in 1761, "he had been told to go for a soldier. . . . He 'strolled,' struggled, starved," [31] and, I conjecture, came to America as a soldier, persuaded Douglass to let him appear in leading rôles (London later knew him as "Plausible Jack"); and certainly *a* Mr. Palmer took a benefit as Romeo in Philadelphia on December 21.

This happened in the Theatre on Society Hill, which Douglass had, on April 5, 1759, got permission to build and act in. The theatre stood at Vernon and Cedar Streets, in Southwark, just across the line from the city. Plumsted's warehouse, which had housed the New Theatre in Water Street of 1754, was still standing, but Douglass' permit—and perhaps his sagacity, following an unfortunate experience in New York with civic authority—required that the company "Act without the bounds of the city." The Theatre on Society Hill was built and furnished by two men with curiously reduplicative names, Alexander Alexander erecting "a large building for the purpose" costing "£300 & upwards," and William Williams painting "a new set of scenes for the said theatre" which came to over £100.[33] Beyond the cost, little is known about the Theatre on Society Hill. Watson [34] says that it "was

[31] Doran, *Annals of the English Stage,* III, 101–4.
[32] Karl Mantzius, *A History of Theatrical Art,* VI, 14.
[33] *Pa. Archives,* III, 659–660.
[34] *Annals,* I, 472.

constructed of wood," but as at least seven other statements in the same paragraph are mistaken, this may not be the last word. The proprietor in 1930 of one of the three houses later built on the site said, on the basis of family tradition, that a brick wall running through the three houses was part of the old proscenium arch. If it was, the theatre was hardly of wood; yet a theatre with such a brick proscenium wall must have been at least comparable with the Theatre in Southwark, which Douglass saw fit to build when he returned to the city in 1766. If the Theatre on Society Hill was so well built in 1759 that its brick proscenium arch was standing in 1930, why was another theatre built next season? And if it was simply a soon-discarded wooden shanty, what explains the curious present brick wall? Of course, one guess is that the theatre was too small to hold the crowds that tried to get in. At any rate, it had a pit, a gallery, and boxes, and the prices were advanced to seven shillings sixpence, five, and three shillings, where they remained till after the Revolution. As far as we know, the Theatre on Society Hill was not used after 1759; but brick or wood, large or small, it housed one brilliant season.

Douglass had carefully got permission to play before starting his theatre, but the sight of the playhouse rising toward the sky down in Southwark roused the enemy, and the war for a prohibition of the drama, in abeyance since 1713, broke out afresh. Petitions beseeching "the House to frame and present to the Governor, for his Assent, a Bill to prohibit such ensnaring and irreligious Entertainments" [35] were presented by the Quakers, the Presbyterians,[36] the Lutherans,[37] and the Baptists [37] in quick order. In a very few days the Assembly drew up a bill "to prevent the Exhibition of theatrical Entertainments" and rushed it to the Governor. Governor Denny conferred with his council, some of whom "observed, that the Prohibition of plays was a most unreasonable restraint . . . from taking innocent Diversions," [38] and finally effected a wily compromise. He sent the law back so amended that it would not go into effect until the following year (January 1, 1760), thus giving the actors a clear six months. If the Assembly wanted any law, it was forced to accept this, though its chief object—to prohibit the use of the Theatre on Society Hill—was defeated. The law was passed

[35] *Votes of the Assembly,* May 22, 1759.
[36] *Ibid.,* May 23.
[37] *Ibid.,* May 26.
[38] *Minutes of the Provincial Council,* VIII, 339–40.

on June 20, and, as the canny Governor doubtless foresaw, was repealed by the King in Council the next year.

The opponents of the theatre were of course not silenced. One nameless upholder of virtue insisted on printing his belief that "the Playhouse, not only when some very prophane Play is on the Stage, but in its daily, common Entertainment, is as certainly the House of the Devil, as the Church is the House of God." [39]

But happily there were other beliefs. Francis Hopkinson wrote the prologue (quoted above) and one epilogue [40] for the production of *Tamerlane* which, on June 25, opened the Theatre, and with other "Gentlemen of this City" promoted a benefit "towards the raising a Fund for purchasing an Organ to the College-Hall in this City, and instructing the Charity Children in Psalmody" on December 27, when he quite probably played with the others in a concert "Before the Play and between the Acts," [41] and for which he certainly wrote a "Prologue in Praise of Music," spoken by Lewis Hallam.[42] His friend Thomas Godfrey, then temporarily in Wilmington, North Carolina, worked feverishly in an attempt to finish his blank-verse tragedy, *The Prince of Parthia,* so that Douglass' company could play it before they left Philadelphia.[43] *The Prince of Parthia* arrived too late for production this season, but was in time to be the first American drama produced when the American Company played it at the Theatre in Southwark on April 24, 1767—after its talented author had died.

The newspapers, published on Thursday, usually announced only the play for the following Friday. The announcements repeatedly said that Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were the "Days of Playing," as they continued to be, with a few exceptions, throughout the century, so we

[39] *Pa. Gazette,* August 30, 1759.

[40] They are included in his *Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings,* Phila., 1792, III, Part 2, 50–53. There might be some doubt that the prologue was written for this particular opening, as the heading says only "A Prologue spoken by MR. LEWIS HALLAM, at the opening of a Theatre at Philadelphia," but as the epilogue given immediately after is entitled, "Epilogue for Tamerlane, Spoken by Mrs. Douglass," no reasonable doubt remains.

[41] A scrupulous scholar, Sonneck, *Francis Hopkinson,* p. 41, has no doubt of Hopkinson's participation.

[42] Hopkinson, *Miscellaneous Essays,* etc., III, Part 2, 54–56.

[43] N. Evans, Preface to Godfrey's *Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects, with the Prince of Parthia,* p. v, and Smith's letter used as postscript to the preface, p. xix.

know that our record of thirty performances is only about one-third complete. But that partial record shows that drama-loving Philadelphia was offered for the first known time *Hamlet, Lear, Richard III, Macbeth,* and *Romeo and Juliet,* as well as (for example) *The Beggar's Opera, The Recruiting Officer, The Drummer,* and *The Suspicious Husband.* Or one could have received edification—as the advertisements were careful to point out—from the Rev. Mr. Home's *Douglas,* or Lillo's lugubrious *George Barnwell.* For more frivolous amusement a number of new farces were offered, such as *Lethe, The Lying Valet,* and *The Virgin Unmasked.* The excellent season closed on December 24, when *Hamlet* was repeated for the benefit of the Pennsylvania Hospital. After the players had gone, the Managers of the Hospital felt called upon to say (though they had accepted the money, as their constitution, part of which they published, required) that the play had been given "without the consent of the said managers." [44] One of course does not doubt such an explicit statement, but, remembering that two of the hospital's managers,[45] Thomas Gordon and Evan Morgan, had been selling tickets for that last production of *Hamlet,*[46] one reads the colonial paper intelligently.

THE AMERICAN COMPANY AND THE THEATRE IN SOUTHWARK

Douglass and his company, leaving Philadelphia at the end of 1759, did not return till 1766. They spent their time till April, 1762, strolling in the colonies, playing at Annapolis, Williamsburg, Charleston, Providence, and New York, and then left the mainland for four years, probably going to the West Indies.[47] When they came back north in 1766, it was with the definite intention of making their home in the colonies, an intention thwarted only by the Revolutionary War. They now called themselves "The American Company" and built in Philadelphia a permanent theatre.

Just when in 1766 they came to Philadelphia is not clear. Durang [48] and Seilhamer [49] agree in saying that their first performance was on

[44] *Pa. Gazette,* Jan. 10, 1760.
[45] T. G. Morton, *The History of the Pennsylvania Hospital,* 405–6.
[46] *Pa. Gazette,* Dec. 27, 1759.
[47] Seilhamer, I, 153.
[48] Series I, Chap. VII.
[49] I, 153.

November 21.[50] However, the *Pennsylvania Journal* for November 6 advertised performances for November 12 and 14, and next week's *Journal,* for November 17 and 19. Furthermore, the advertisements of November 6 and 13 made no mention of the performances as opening the theatre, and there was no mention at all of the customary occasional prologue and epilogue. Accordingly, it seems quite possible that the Theatre in Southwark had been opened even before November 12, 1766. It is even possible that the players had arrived in the spring and opened the Theatre on Society Hill, which for some unknown reason they had abandoned. As early as June 27 the Quakers had "with real concern, heard that a Company of Stage Players are lately arrived in this City," [51] and of course prayed for the prohibition of "ensnaring and irreligious entertainments." Four days later, "E. F." wrote to the *Pennsylvania Journal* a letter which concluded with the blasting indictment (whose fearful irony is quite lost out of its context): "They forsooth are going to build a Playhouse at Philadelphia." Another letter (published in the *Gazette* for July 31) remarked bitterly the infatuation of those who "give encouragement to a Sett of strolling Comedians . . . lawless vagrants. . . . I suppose they are the same Sett of Gentry who attempted to exhibit in New York, and who were drove thence with righteous Indignation by the Inhabitants." This season heard a large number of similar tirades from those who were neither followers of the gentle Francis nor yet believers in letting the grain grow till the harvest.[52]

The playhouse whose erection was at least in part causing such an outcry was the New Theatre in Southwark,[53] built just outside the city limits, as the Theatre on Society Hill had been. "The lot which was selected for the theatre was in South [then Cedar] street, between Fourth and Fifth streets, at the corner of a small street, since called Apollo [later Charles, now Leithgow Street] in consequence of a minor

[50] Dunlap, p. 22, says that Douglass built and opened the Southwark Theatre in 1760. His statement, unsupported by any evidence or probability, deserves no further mention.

[51] The MS of their petition is in The Hist. Soc. of Pa.

[52] See, e. g., *Pa. Gazette,* Feb. 5, Mar. 12, Apr. 30, July 2, 1767; *Pa. Journal,* Feb. 19, Mar. 5; *Pa. Chronicle,* Feb. 9 (sequor), Feb. 23, Apr. 6, 1767.

[53] Interestingly enough, Southwark "was named after Southwark in London," to which a number of the Elizabethan theatres had gone to escape the city limits. It was incorporated as part of Philadelphia in 1794. A. H. Espenshade, *Pennsylvania Place Names,* p. 33.

theatre which was erected there in 1811. . . . On this lot [54] Douglass erected [a] large frame building" [55] with brick walls for its first story. "The framework was painted red, the prevailing color" for the theatres throughout the country. It "was well adapted for theatrical representations," Dunlap says,[56] and was ugly—"no ornament to the city"—in its physical appearance. Watson quotes "my friend Lang Syne" [57] as saying of it (as it was twenty years later), "The building, compared with the new houses, was an ugly, ill-contrived affair outside and inside. The stage lighted by plain oil lamps without glasses. The view from the boxes was intercepted by large square wooden pillars supporting the upper tier and roof. It was contended by many, at the time, that the front bench in the gallery was the best seat for a fair view of the whole stage." The New Theatre in Southwark was plain and lacked outward charm, but it was a substantial, permanent theatre, in use for over half a century (though not important after 1794), and holds a place of high honor in theatrical history.

Douglass had brought to Philadelphia a company largely new, with the famous Miss Cheer as leading woman. Miss Wainwright and Mr. Woolls, both singers, and Miss Sarah Hallam, later leading actress, were also important additions to the troupe. Lewis Hallam was still the leading man, now without the competition of Mr. Harman. One of the playgoers of the period, Graydon, has left in his *Memoirs* [58] an interesting criticism of the troupe. He says that Lewis Hallam, "then in full culmination, was the Roscius of the theatre. As the dramatic heroes were all *his* without a competitor, so the heroines were the exclusive property of Miss Cheer, who was deemed an admirable performer. The singing department was supplied and supported by the voices of Wools and Miss Wainwright, said to have been pupils of doctor Arne; while in the tremulous drawle of the old man, in low jest and buffoonery, Morris, thence the minion of the gallery, stood first and unrivalled. As for the Tomlinsons, the Walls, the Allens, &c. they were your Bonifaces, your Jessamys, your Mock Doctors, and what not. On the female side, Mrs. Douglass was a respectable, matron-like dame, stately

[54] Durang says, Series I, Chap. XVIII, that Douglass bought it from Richard Willing.

[55] Durang, Series I, Chap. VI.

[56] p. 22.

[57] *Annals*, I, 473.

[58] pp. 76–78.

or querulous as occasion required, a very good Gertrude, a truly appropriate lady Randolph with her white handkerchief and her weeds. . . . Mrs. Harman bore away the palm as a duenna, and Miss Wainwright as a chambermaid. Although these were among the principal performers at first, the Company was from time to time essentially improved by additions: Among these, the Miss Storers, Miss Hallam and Mr. Henry, were valuable acquisitions; as was also a Mr. Goodman, who had read law in Philadelphia with Mr. Ross. . . .

"Whether there may be any room for comparison between these . . . and the performers of the present day [1811], I venture not to say. Nothing is more subject to fashion than the style of public exhibitions. . . . I cannot but say, however, that in my opinion, the old company acquitted themselves with most animation and glee—they were a passable set of comedians."

The New Theatre in Southwark was opened at least by November 14, 1766, and the American Company played till July 6, 1767. As a new paper, the *Pennsylvania Chronicle,* printed on Mondays, appeared on and after January 26, 1767, we have after that date papers on Monday and Thursday, and hence usually record of two of the three weekly performances. For the entire season of about a hundred nights, we know definitely of fifty-nine bills, with forty different full-length plays, twenty-six of the plays new to the record in Philadelphia.

The most important historical events of the season were the announcement of Forrest's *The Disappointment* and the production of Godfrey's *The Prince of Parthia.* Though Forrest's comic opera had the honor of being the first American play announced for production (on April 20), it was happily withdrawn (as containing "personal reflections . . . unfit for the stage") just in time to give a superior play, *The Prince of Parthia,* the honor of being the first American drama produced on the stage. Unfortunately the actual cast for *The Prince of Parthia* was not published, though the names of the principal actors were. Seilhamer [59] has already suggested a cast which is probably about as close to the fact as we will get:

Artabanes.....Mr. Douglass	Phraates.....Mr. Greville
Vardanes.....Mr. Tomlinson	Bethas.....Mr. Morris
Arsaces.....Mr. Hallam	Thermusa.....Mrs. Douglass
Gotarzes.....Mr. Wall	Evanthe.....Miss Cheer

[59] I, 194

Barzaphernes.....Mr. Allyn	Cleone.....Miss Wainwright
Lysias.....Mr. Broadbelt	Edessa.....Mrs. Morris

Among the other important productions new to the city were *Cymbeline* and *The Merchant of Venice, All for Love, The Beaux' Stratagem, The Conscious Lovers, Jane Shore, Love for Love* (with its "Luxuriances" prudently "cropped"), *Catherine and Petruchio*—Garrick's two-act farce from *The Taming of the Shrew*—and Thomson's *Coriolanus. Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Richard III,* and *Romeo and Juliet,* among others, reappeared.

Musical entertainments—"operas" and "ballad-operas"—were growing in popularity, a growth which continued throughout the century. A capable actor in those days had to be able to sing as well as act, and two of the new performers, Miss Wainwright and Mr. Woolls, were primarily vocalists. The production [60] of Bickerstaff's opera, *Love in a Village,* called forth the first newspaper theatrical criticism in Philadelphia, in the form of a letter by a "gentleman contributor" to the *Pennsylvania Gazette:*

As the Practice prevails in our Mother Country, I hope you will have no objections against inserting in your paper the observations that any gentleman may decently make concerning the Actors in our little Theatre here.

I do not relie wholly upon my own delicacy of Judgment in the following Remarks, for I have gathered and compared the Sentiments of many others, who have had good opportunities of improving their taste of both Plays and Players. The Practice of altering the Author's Expressions is so universally condemned by all Men of Sense, and leaves no excuse for the Vanity or Neglect of the Actor; and I hope this little Hint will be sufficient to guard our Actors against anything of the like Nature for the future; for they ought to consider that one indecent, unguarded, ill judged Expression, will do them inconceivable Mischief in this Country, and that no Advantage can arise from taking such a Liberty, but if they clearly avoid this Rock, and are prudent in the Choice of Plays, the rational Entertainment must, and will succeed, agreeable to the highest Wishes of those who are concerned in it.

I am sorry Mr. Hallam, who is genteel in his Person and Actions, could not take Copy from the inimitable Garrick, and speak plain English, whenever he assumes a character that may be supposed to understand the Language. There is no necessity of destroying the least articulate Beauty of Language, thro' Fury, Eagerness, or Passion;

[60] Sometime before the first newspaper announcement. See Jan. 22, 1767, for critical mention, and March 19, 1767, for the first announcement.

Miss Cheer never loses the sweetest Accent, or faulters in the Clearness of Expression, from any or all those Causes, though I believe she is equally delicate, and capable of feeling the Force of Passion.

I am not alone, when I pronounce her one of the best Players in the Empire; she appears to me, from that Ease of Behaviour which always shines through every Action, to have been much among People of Fashion, for she well fits the highest Character she ever assumes.

I must beg leave to inform the Public, that the pleasing LOVE IN A VILLAGE is done here beyond expectation, and must give real Delight to every Person void of Ill-Nature. . . . Miss Wainwright is a very good Singer, and her Action exceeds the famous Miss Brent. Mr. Hallam exceeds everything in the Character of Hodge; and Mr. Woolls almost equals Beard in Hawthorn. Miss Hallam deserves universal Applause and Encouragement. I could wish to see the House better filled whenever this justly applauded Entertainment is exhibited.

The small audiences during the winter are again referred to in a notice in the *Pennsylvania Journal* of January 8, 1767:

The Director of the Theatre begs leave to assure the Town that, for the future, no Audience, be it ever so small, will be disappointed, upon any account whatsoever, and that the Play advertised will be certainly performed.

One can easily imagine that on snowy nights in January Philadelphians may have preferred the warmth of their own firesides to a tramp across unpaved lanes to the wooden theatre.

The critical game having been started, a writer in the *Gazette* for January 29 continued it, mentioning again Hallam's bad habit of seeming "to suck in, or at least not to utter the first letters of the words he speaks," and the "justly celebrated and much admired Miss Cheer." From this time on there were occasional criticisms in the papers, though they did not become frequent till after the Revolution.

The war against the theatre was still on, and on February 17, 1767, "A Remonstrance from a Great Number of the Inhabitants of the City and County of Philadelphia, of several religious denominations, was presented to the House and read." [61] The House was moved to send to Governor John Penn a resolution which "respectfully sheweth" that it did not want the theatre, as too expensive, hurtful of business, and destructive of frugality.[62] But nothing came of it, and it is more pleasant

[61] *Votes of Assembly,* Feb. 17, 1767.
[62] *Ibid.,* Feb. 18.

to notice that there were men who rose in articulate defense of the stage.[63] Probably the most interesting defense was that of a clergyman recently out from England, who had sinned against a young lady's notions by going to the theatre. He [64] took the trouble to publish a thin volume with the delightful title, *True Pleasure, Chearfulness, & Happiness, the Immediate Consequence of* RELIGION *Fully and concisely proved With remarks on the* THEATRE *Addressed to a young Lady in Pennsylvania.* In it he explained his position wisely and irenicly, saying that he intended to continue enjoying the drama, and answering many of the theological and economic arguments against the theatre. "I am ashamed," he wrote, "to combat superstition; but . . . must Shakespeare, the immortal Shakespeare be destroyed—shall Molière be burnt—; shall Plautus, Terence, Euripides . . . be involved in the horrid conflagration?" [65]

JOHN HENRY AND THE MISSES STORER

The American Company opened the Theatre in Southwark for a short supplementary season in the autumn of 1767, while waiting for the John Street Theatre in New York to be finished. This season extended from October 6 to November 23, with at least twelve different plays presented. Before the "legitimate" season began, Douglass and Hallam opened the theatre (on September 9 and 24) and offered Steven's very popular *Lecture on Heads,* with singing by various members of the company, "accompanied by the Band of his Majesty's Eighteenth Regiment." In the regular season, two plays new to Philadelphia were given: *Venice Preserved* (which has been overpraised as the best romantic tragedy since Shakespeare) and *The Clandestine Marriage.*

Another important event was the first appearance on the continent of John Henry, who at twenty-one [66] had already had a crowded life, and Miss Ann Storer, both "from the theatre in Jamaica." After the Revolution Henry shared the management of the Old American Company

[63] See *Pa. Journal,* Feb. 12, 19, Mar. 12, 1767.

[64] Probably, though the book is anonymous. But certainly if the clergyman did not write it, it was written for him. Published by Wm. and Thos. Bradford, Phila., 1767.

[65] Incidentally, this came seven years before Dr. Cooper's New York prologue, which Seilhamer (I, 323) says was the first time an American clergyman "gave the drama any recognition."

[66] See *Daily Advertiser,* Jan. 10, 1795.

with Hallam. "Tall and commanding in person," Henry must have been "as handsome an Aimwell as ever trod the stage";[67] he was primarily a comedian. Dunlap tells us[68] that there were originally four Misses Storer with their mother in Jamaica. "Henry married the eldest, but during a voyage from Jamaica, the vessel in which she was a passenger . . . was burnt, and she with it." The other three sisters were Ann (or Nancy), Fanny, and Maria. Ann Storer appeared this season, and was known in the Philadelphia seasons of 1769–70, 1772–73, and 1773 as Mrs. Henry (later she became Mrs. Hogg). Fanny, not of immediate interest to our record, became Mrs. Mechtler, and so appeared here in 1796. Maria Storer, who played in Philadelphia from 1768 to 1773 under that name, became later the last Mrs. John Henry, and so the Philadelphia stage knew her from 1789 (or earlier) to 1793.

AUTUMN, 1768

The American Company went to New York after the fall season of 1767, where it opened the John Street Theatre, a replica of the Southwark. It did not return to Philadelphia till the fall of 1768; the exact date is uncertain. The *Chronicle* for September 19 reported "that the Theatre in Southwark will be opened, *for one Month only,* on Wednesday the 21st Instant, with a Comedy." However, the first announcement I have discovered is for October 4, when the company announced its stay "For one Month only," although the season, once started, extended to January 6, 1769. The advertisements this season were very meager, perhaps, as Seilhamer suggests, because the company was hard pressed for money after meeting with deadening opposition in New York.[69] Only thirteen announcements appeared in as many weeks (and there were papers on two different days), with only eight casts. Miss Maria Storer was the only important addition to the company; Darby, Parker, and Byerley replaced Greville, Malone, and Allyn in minor parts; Miss Wainwright, the singer, did not appear, and Miss Cheer and Lewis Hallam were still the leads.

Six new plays at least were given in this brief season: the rarely seen

[67] Seilhamer, I, 199, says that on this point "it is possible to agree with Dunlap for once."

[68] p. 29.

[69] Seilhamer, I, 234.

King John, Alexander the Great, The Busy Body (very popular to the end of the century), *False Delicacy, The Spanish Fryar,* and *Zara.* On December 9 and 14 Douglass introduced as an added attraction "Two Italian Brothers" who set off "An Elegant Sett of Fireworks," which were so good that the ceiling had to be "opened to carry off the Smoak." Mr. Douglass "with great Pleasure, observed the Satisfaction" which the fireworks gave the audience.

"SUMMER" AND YOUNG MANAGERS

The American Company went to New York in January, and returned in the autumn. In the spring of 1769, while the Theatre in Southwark was dark, the "Lovers of Elocution" were offered the chance to hear, at the Academy and the Assembly Room in Lodge Alley, a number of poems and speeches read, and operas read and their songs sung. The first of these performances came on May 23, when "a person who professes to teach with propriety to read any author in the English language" read Thomson's "Summer," and announced that "Proposals will shortly be published for the reading of Milton's Paradise Lost by subscription." When I first discovered this announcement, I hoped to learn that *Paradise Lost* had been read publicly in Philadelphia, but did not. However, Pope's "Sappho to Phaon," Demosthenes' Seventh Oration, and Voltaire's "Folly on Both Sides" were recited, and *Damon and Phillida, The Beggar's Opera, Love in a Village, The Maid of the Mill* (first act), and *The Musical Lady* were read, and their songs sung—all between May 23 and June 26. This interesting season (the readers and singers anonymous) was the only one of its kind I have discovered in the whole of the eighteenth century, though in the 1790's actors, especially James Fennell, gave readings from plays.

The Theatre in Southwark was opened on August 11, 1769, by Mr. Malone, with the American Company in New York in 1767, who promised that he would "exhibit several PERFORMANCES on the SLACK ROPE in FULL SWING."

The following letter from Manager Douglass, unaddressed, but doubtless to the Governor, John Penn, asking authority to open the theatre for a season, is now in the Shaw Theatre Collection. The mood of the letter is significant of the difficulties the colonial manager had to undergo; and it is significant, too, that in a time of distress the American Company turned to Philadelphia.

Sir

The great Indulgence, your Honour has, so often, been good enough to shew me, while it demands every grateful acknowledgement, a Breast, I hope, not insensible, can possibly entertain, covers me with Shame, when the Situation of our Affairs, make so frequent Applications absolutely necessary.

I had flatter'd myself, that I shou'd not, for a Year to come, at least, have given your Honour any Trouble, but a Disappointment at Carolina, and the recent loss of a great and honour'd Friend and Patron, whose Memory will be ever dear to the American Theatre, has made such a change in our Circumstances, that nothing but an exertion of that Humanity, which you possess in so eminent a Degree, can save us from Destruction.

Let my Situation speak for me, and, with your usual goodness, do not think me too importunate, if I sollicite your Honour for Permission to open the Theatre, for a short Time, this Winter, previous to my going to Annapolis, where I propose spending the Remainder of it.

The Maid of the Mill, the Padlock, and some other Pieces, not perform'd, hitherto, on this Stage, will, I flatter myself, give Your Honour some Entertainment.

I shou'd not have made my application in this Manner, but wou'd have waited on you myself, were not my feelings, upon the Occasion, too great, to permit me to say what I ought.

I shall intrude no farther upon your time, than to assure you, that it is impossible for any Person, among the Numbers who have been the Objects of your Benevolence, to have a more grateful sense of it, than

Sir

Your Honour's most
Obed^{t}. and oblig'd hum. Serv.
David Douglass.

October 5th
1769

The permission was given, and the actors did not make the visit to Annapolis which Douglass mentioned, but stayed in Philadelphia all winter.

The American Company's season did not officially open till November 8. But on September 14 Lewis Hallam and John Henry, managers of the Old American Company after the Revolution, tried their hands as entrepreneurs, and announced at the Southwark a variety performance including the popular *Lecture on Heads,* singing, and a "Camera Obscura," which seems to have been some kind of magic lantern, and was "secured at considerable expence and trouble." Their inducement on September 25 was even more daring, if less mechanical—the young managers cut the prices to five, three, and two shillings! They also

dreamed of "an Entertainment every Evening this Week," but admitted in the *Journal* of September 28 that it was "out of their power to fulfill that intention." On September 25 they gave *The Oracle* and *Harlequin Collector,* on September 29 *The Wrangling Lovers* and *The Dwarfs,* and on September 30 *The Oracle* and *The Dwarfs.*

AN ORCHESTRA AND THE GALLERY

On November 8, 1769, the American Company opened what was to be a brilliant season, playing at the Theatre in Southwark till the first of June, 1770. Our record, about three-fifths complete, shows forty-five performances, with thirty-three different full-length plays, thirteen of which were new, and nineteen afterpieces.

The American Company had now become established; it was in Philadelphia an accepted institution. We have no reason to believe that the anti-theatrical party had materially altered its attitude, but the columns of the newspapers for this season are pleasantly free from extravagant diatribes. Indeed, the company was so naturally accepted (according to another of Seilhamer's plausible conjectures) that it did not think it necessary to advertise its casts in the newspapers, so that for this season, though we have fuller knowledge than before as to the plays given, we do not know much about the assignment of parts. So far as we can tell, there was only one addition of any importance to the personnel of the company: Miss Richardson, whose name appears in a handbill for March 30, 1770, happily preserved in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. It is possible that she was the "young gentlewoman" who played on December 12, 1769. "A young gentleman" appeared on June 1, 1770, who may have been Mr. Goodman, sometime a Philadelphia law student; Durang says [70] that Goodman "probably joined the company in 1770, when at Philadelphia." Miss Sarah Hallam was now the leading actress, Miss Cheer and Miss Wainwright both having left the stage.

The company now apparently had a regular orchestra, as the advertisement for December 1 said, "The Orchestra, on Opera Nights, will be assisted by some musical Persons, who, as they have no View but to contribute to the Entertainment of the Public, certainly claim a Protection from any Manner of Insult." Exactly what form of insult was feared is not clear. Seilhamer evidently assumes [71] that it was the social

[70] Series I, Chap. VIII.

[71] I, 275.

ostracism then supposedly endangering any one who associated with the players. This may have been true, but I find it difficult to believe that David Douglass would have thought his advertisement could have warded the amateur performers from the subtler forms of social insult. It is more likely that he feared trouble might come (perhaps it had already come, as it later came) in a more tangible form from the boys in the gallery, whose delicate sense of the incongruous might easily have been aroused by the spectacle of Philadelphia gentlemen seriously busy at their music in the orchestra pit, a fair target for oranges. It was late in 1769; the not very carefully analyzed notion of "liberty" was arousing the masses; and it is uncomfortably near the truth to realize that Francis Hopkinson, then a young vestryman of Christ Church, perhaps playing a "neat" harpsichord, would have been at a strategic disadvantage by being below, and within range of, the gallery.[72] But one hopes Douglass' advertisement had its effect, and is glad to know that the theatre now had a regular orchestra, even if it occasionally could use assistance.

After December 1 the normal days of playing (for this season only) were Tuesday and Friday, and in November the curtain rose at six; as the days grew longer, the time of opening grew later. A note on February 19 reminds us that we are thinking of the eighteenth century:

> A Foot Way is made across the Common, to the Corner of Pine-Street, in Fourth-Street, on which those Ladies who are not provided with Carriages, may come to the House without dirtying their Feet.
>
> Mr. Douglass will be extremely obliged to any Lady or Gentleman who will lend him the Burlesque Opera of the *Dragon of Wantley*.

Among the important new productions were *The Masque of Comus, Julius Caesar, The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Tempest* (in Shadwell's version, with the spectacular *Masque of Neptune and Amphitrite* —of course, all these Shakespearean plays were put through what Odell calls the eighteenth-century filter), *The Good-Natured Man,* and *The Tender Husband.* That charming "opera," *The Padlock,* was also new. "In the *Padlock,*" Dunlap says,[73] "Mr. Hallam was unrivalled to his

[72] See Sonneck, *Francis Hopkinson,* p. 50. It is merely possible that Hopkinson was one of the performers, but certain that a gentleman in the orchestra pit ran certain risks. In a later decade half the instruments in the orchestra were broken one night by missiles from the gallery. See, e. g., *General Advertiser,* Oct. 25, 1794.

[73] p. 31.

death, giving the Mungo with a truth derived from study of the negro slave character, which Dibdin the author [of the music] could not have conceived."

1772–1773

After leaving Philadelphia in 1770, the American Company went to the South, not returning to its northern empire till 1772,[74] when it began the last important season in Philadelphia before the Revolution, from October 28, 1772, to March 31,[75] 1773. It was a good season; though we know of only about two-thirds of the performances,[76] our record includes forty-five nights, with thirty-two different plays, ten of which were new. Among the new plays were *King Henry IV,* part one (with Mr. Douglass as Falstaff, Mr. Henry as Prince Hal, and Mr. Hallam as Hotspur), *Othello* (Mr. Hallam, the Moor), *The West Indian,* and *Lionel and Clarissa.* The performance for the first time on any stage of Cockings' *The Conquest of Canada* (which happily is not to be ranked as an American play) was made elaborately, the stage "much crouded with the ARTILLERY, BOATS, &c. necessary for the representation of the piece; and with the Men from both Corps, whose assistance the Commanding Officers are good enough to indulge us with." One hopes the spectacle was grand enough to overpower some of the most pedestrian verse in the language. It ran for three straight nights.

Among the new performers were the second Mrs. Morris, Goodman, the Philadelphia law student (we are sure of his appearance now), and Francis Mentges. The first Mrs. Morris had been drowned in December, 1767; the second, who was still on the Philadelphia stage at the end of the century, was a beautiful, stately, and pretentious woman, at times exceedingly popular. Francis Mentges appeared as a dancer; he was later a fencing master, and rose during the Revolution to be a Lieutenant Colonel, remaining in that rank as Inspector of Militia as

[74] In the American Company's absence, though there was no drama, there were occasional entertainments including *A Lecture on Heads* (*Chronicle,* August 1, 15, 22, 1772; *Journal,* Aug. 12); fireworks (*Chronicle,* Aug. 24, 1772); and "Equestrianism" (*Gazette,* Sept. 26, 1771, *Chronicle,* Aug. 29, Sept. 5, Sept. 12, Nov. 4, 1772.)

[75] The date of the last announcement, though as it says "The last night but one," the last performance was probably on Friday, April 2.

[76] Usually for Monday and Wednesday; this year the *Journal* and *Gazette* were published on Wednesday, leaving the performances of Friday unrecorded.

late as 1788.[77] Lewis Hallam and his cousin Sarah were still the leading performers—both at the height of their fame. Indeed, the company was, in the opinion of a competent judge, of high quality, "equal at least," wrote William Eddis, "to those who sustain the best of your [England's] characters in your most celebrated provincial theatres."[78]

The nuisance from the sons of liberty in the gallery was growing worse. "A most crouded and brilliant Audience" saw *A Word to the Wise* and *The Padlock* on the opening night, and Philo-Theatricus, "upon the Judgment of Gentlemen of undoubted Knowledge and Taste in theatrical Performances," said that Hallam's was "the best Mungo upon the British stage";[79] but he asked indignantly if constables could not be secured to suppress the "Ruffians in the Gallery, who so frequently interrupted the Performance, committed repeated outrages upon that Part of the Audience who go there really to see the Play, and interrupted the Actors who are doing their best to please them." Perhaps the managers got a constable—the Southwark had one in the 90's; at any rate, no further protest was made in the papers as the season progressed.

THE LAST COLONIAL SEASON

The actors went to New York in April, returning to Philadelphia for a brief appearance—their last before the Revolution—from November 1 to 15, 1773. They had lost one of their most dependable actresses, Mrs. Catherine Maria Harman, granddaughter of Colley Cibber, who had died in New York on May 27. She was "a just actress, possessed much merit in low comedy . . . [and] in private life . . . was sensible, humane, and benevolent."[80] Otherwise the company was unchanged, though Miss Wainwright, who was living in Philadelphia, reappeared. No new plays were given.

In the *Packet* of Monday, November 15, Manager Douglass announced that "the PLAY on Saturday, was by him, really, absolutely, and *bona fide,* intended for the last performance," but that as many had asked for *The West Indian,* and the vessel which was to take the troupe to Carolina had been delayed, they would give one more performance.

[77] Graydon's *Memoirs,* 100; *Minutes of the Assembly of Penna.,* March 4, 1788; Seilhamer, III, 142.

[78] Quoted by Odell, I, 173.

[79] *Chronicle,* Oct. 31, 1772.

[80] Odell, I, 166, quoting obituary in *Rivington's Gazette* for June 3, 1773.

Trouble arose in the company over the casting of *The West Indian.* Mr. Goodman had played Major O'Flaherty in the previous season, but the part was announced for Mr. Henry, "being his third appearance in that character," and Mr. Goodman, a Philadelphian, was not cast at all. Parts were sacred property, and apparently Goodman was ready to fight for his rights. The manager felt it necessary to publish this broadside, happily preserved in the Shaw Theatre Collection:

Theatre,
Monday Morning, November 15, 1773.

Mr. Douglass having been informed that there is a Probability of a Disturbance happening in the House this Evening, occasioned by a Dispute that subsists between Mr. Goodman and Mr. Henry, concerning the part of Major O'Flaherty, thinks it a Duty incumbent upon him to do all he can to prevent it, and the only Method that suggests itself to him, is to give up the Play entirely, for this season, for should any Mischief happen, he would think himself accountable for the Consequences.

In a few hours another broadside, also preserved in the Shaw Theatre Collection, was printed:

The Town's Compliments to Mr. Douglass—are sorry that his apprehensions of a Disturbance in the House, should preclude them from the Pleasure they expected this Evening at the Representation of the West-Indian—Therefore desire, nay insist, that the Play shall go forward.

Whether or not *The West Indian* was given, one cannot be certain, though quite probably it was. For Mr. Goodman had another reason for wanting to appear that night. A farewell epilogue, very possibly the one announced for Mr. Hallam, had, so the *Packet* a week later said,[81] been "intended to be spoken by MR. GOODMAN the last night." The mention of "the last night" would indicate that there had been that last night. The epilogue rose to the climax:

Twas then he spoke aloud, this firm decree,
"My sons—be VIRTUOUS, *and my sons—be* FREE."

The Revolution was not far away, and the country was girding its loins for the contest. Douglass took his company to the south; then after a very successful season in Charleston,[82] the company came back north,

[81] Nov. 22, 1773. The epilogue is printed in full.
[82] See Willis, 74.

leaving Charleston in June, and in part at least returning to Philadelphia by September. Mr. Goodman and Mr. Allen (the latter a recent arrival from the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh) announced for September 19 at the Theatre in Southwark "An Attic Evening's Entertainment," composed of recitations and lectures, with an "Introductory Address to the town." Probably others of the company were in the city; Durang says that "At this eventful period the Thespians made a demonstration to act in Philadelphia." [83] But if they played at all, no record has survived.

The Revolution was too near, and the Continental Congress, then in session in Philadelphia, resolved on October 20, 1774, "That we will in our several stations encourage frugality . . . and discountenance and discourage, every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock fighting, exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments." It is important to notice that the reason at this time for discouraging the theatre was not, at least on the surface, a continuation of the earlier opposition to the playhouse, but was a clearing of the social decks for action as the conflict with the mother country approached war. The recommendation of Congress was ratified by Pennsylvania in January of the next year (1775), when the convention for the province of Pennsylvania "Resolved Unanimously, that this convention most heartily approve of the conduct and proceedings of the Continental Congress, [and] That we will faithfully endeavour to carry into execution, the measures of the association entered into, and recommended by them."

COLONIAL RETROSPECT

The curtain was finally down on Philadelphia's, and America's, colonial stage. Of the players in the American Company just before the Revolution, only two, Mrs. Douglass (Hallam), the Queen Mother of that stage, and her son Lewis Hallam, its leading actor, had been with the original Company of Comedians from London. A number of the players never returned, so far as we know, to the city. Just when Mrs. Douglass died is a question complicated by a notice of her death appearing in *Rivington's Gazette* (New York) for September 23, 1773,[84] while she was demonstrably still alive. It is probable that she died in Philadel-

[83] Series I, Chap. IX.

[84] Quoted by Odell, I, 174.

phia in 1774. John North,[85] for many years caretaker of the Theatre in Southwark, said that she died in "a large frame house which stood nearly opposite the South street theatre" (it was a tavern), and that "she was buried in the Presbyterian ground corner of Fourth and Arch streets." Mr. Douglass, the leading theatrical manager in early America, left for Jamaica, married again,[86] and never returned to America, at least as an actor. Miss Sarah Hallam retired from the stage, becoming a teacher of dancing in Virginia.[87] But Lewis Hallam, John Henry and Maria Storer-Henry, Mr. and Mrs. Owen Morris, and Mr. Stephen Woolls were to return after a period of exile to the Philadelphia stage.

The plays given in the colonial city, from the time of *Cato* in August, 1749, to *The West Indian* in November, 1773, represented the best of the British theatre. The repertories of the Comedians from London and the American Company were well chosen, with little dead wood and many plays of real value. Not only in ratio to the number of performances, but in the actual count of good plays in a given season, our colonial theatre compares favorably with, if it does not surpass, the modern professional stage. Thirty-five or forty different plays, most of them quite good, with nearly as many farces, shorter comedies, musical plays, and pantomimes, were not unusual. The Shakespearean plays given before the Revolution may be taken as an index. Though our knowledge is far from complete, the record includes *Hamlet, Lear, Richard III, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Cymbeline, The Merchant of Venice, King John, Julius Caesar, The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Tempest, Henry IV Part One,* and *Othello,* as well as such Shakespearean derivatives as Dryden's *All for Love,* Garrick's *Catherine and Petruchio,* and Thomson's *Coriolanus.*

[85] Quoted by Durang, Chap. XII, Series 1.
[86] Odell, I, 174.
[87] Odell, I, 173.

CHAPTER II

AN INTERLUDE BY MILITARY ACTORS

1776–1778

AND NOW, between the end of the colonial stage and the beginning of the national, there was an interlude—or rather, there were two interludes—by military actors. In Philadelphia the British officers, occupying the city during the winter of 1777–1778, were the players. And just outside the city the American Army, quartered at Valley Forge, improvised a theatre and gave plays during the spring of 1778.

HOWE'S THESPIANS

Shortly after the British had taken Philadelphia and settled down to a winter of gaiety, their officers opened the Theatre in Southwark, organized a company composed of British officers and soldiers' wives, and gave plays. Their first step was to get a staff for the theatre. On December 31, 1777, they advertised in the *Pennsylvania Ledger* that they "Wanted for the Play-house, a PERSON who writes quick, and a legible hand; also, a Person well versed in accounts, to act as Clerk and Vice-Treasurer. Any people that have ever been employed about the Play-House, as carpenters or scene-shifters, may get employment." They apparently secured a Mr. Smith as manager, as they announced later in the season that "Any person having any demands against the Theatre, ares requested to bring in, immediately their accounts to Mr. Smith at the office of the Theatre in Front street." [1]

They had difficulties in getting play-books. On January 3, 1778, the officers wrote to the *Pennsylvania Ledger* that "The COMEDY, called A Wonder or a Woman keeps a Secret is wanted for the use of the Theatre. Any person having it, that will either sell or lend it, is requested to apply to the Printer." John North, caretaker of the Theatre in Southwark, told Durang years later of the scarcity of play-books, and also that "Miss Hyde sang and acted with the British officers during

[1] *Pa. Ledger,* April 29, 1778.

the war. She belonged to one of the first companies that came here from the West Indies. [?] She sang 'Tally Ho' between the play and the farce. Many of the soldiers' wives helped the officers on the stage. They were generally of no character. They and the officers were about the theatre all day. When any piece was to be rehearsed, they all would flock about the back door, or the side lot." [2]

The leading spirits in this amateur corps were Major André and Captain Delancey. North said that Delancey was an excellent actor, and that André, in spite of his charming personality and other talents, was not. André was the scene painter, and a drop scene of his was part of the scenery of the theatre till the fire of 1821, hanging "about the middle of the third entrance, as called in stage directions. The name of André was inscribed in large black letters on the back of it; thus put, no doubt, on its completion, as is sometimes the custom with scenic artists." [3] It is a grim thought that less than twenty years later (May 14, 1798) *The Death of Major André* was an entertainment at the circus.

Altogether Howe's Thespians gave thirteen performances at the Southwark between January 19 and May 19, 1778, introducing to the city *The Lyar, The Minor,* and *No One's Enemy But His Own,* as well as the new farces, *Duke and No Duke* and *A Trip to Scotland.* Among their announcements is the curious note, in the *Ledger* of January 26:

> Gentlemen are earnestly requested not to bribe the Door-keepers. The Foreign Gentleman who slipped a Guinea and a Half into the Hand of the Box-keeper, and forced his way into the House, is desired to send to the office of the Theatre in Front-street, that it may be returned.

Not content with managing the theatre, Major André and Captain Delancey were active in perfecting the chivalric splendor of the *Mischianza,* given on May 18, 1778.[4] Though not strictly dramatic, this spectacular and theatrical pageant in farewell to General Howe, who had been recalled to England, deserves to be mentioned if only for its theatrical exhibition of the old chivalry.

About half past four in the afternoon a grand flotilla of bedecked

[2] Durang, Chap. XII, Series 1.

[3] Durang, Chap. X, Series 1.

[4] See *Pa. Ledger,* May 18, 1778; *Gentleman's Magazine,* Aug., 1778, pp. 353–357; Watson, *Annals of Phila.,* II, 290–293.

galleys, barges, and smaller craft, led by three bands and guarded by ships of the navy, left Knight's Wharf, in the Delaware above Vine Street, and rowed down the river "regular to harmony." Near the old fort in Southwark the guests disembarked, and marched through an avenue of grenadiers to the large square lawn before the Wharton country mansion. There an elaborate tournament was held, with all the pomp of chivalry. The Knights of the Blended Rose, "habited in white and red silk and mounted on gray chargers, richly caparisoned," proclaimed by herald that "the Ladies of the Blended Rose excel in wit, beauty and every accomplishment, those of the *whole world.*" The Knights of the Burning Mountain, in black and orange, maintained that the damsels whose fame they defended were not excelled "by any in the universe." In the first onslaught spears were shivered; later pistols and swords were used. Finally the leaders fought in single combat till commanded by the Marshal of the Field instantly to desist, as honor, virtue, and beauty were satisfied.

Passing under a triumphal arch, the company entered the mansion, splendidly and elaborately furnished, and danced in the ball-room till ten, when the windows were thrown open and "a magnificent bouquet of rockets" blazed against the night. The display of fireworks continued till midnight. Then supper was announced, and "large folding doors, hitherto artfully concealed," opened to display the dining salon, which, with the officers and ladies, made "a *coup d'œil* beyond description magnificent." After supper and many toasts, the ball continued till four o'clock, when "the most splendid entertainment . . . ever given by an army to their general," as Major André called it, was over. After this farewell, General Howe sailed for England. A month later the American Army entered Philadelphia.

AMERICAN MILITARY ACTORS

While Howe's Thespians were playing in Philadelphia, the American Army was producing plays at Valley Forge. As soon as the critical winter of suffering was over, a theatre was opened, evidently at the "Bakehouse." No newspapers or play-bills have preserved the records of this season, so we have to rely on fugitive documents. But we know that a play was given on April 15, 1778, to a crowded house, and that *Cato* was produced on May 11, with other plays in preparation.

On April 15 George Ewing, a soldier of Valley Forge, made the following entry in his *Military Journal:*

15 . . . this afternoon I receivd a ticket for the Play to be acted this evening at the Bakehouse in the evening went down in company with Major Bloomfield Lieuts Curtis Wayman & Kessey but the house was so full that I could not get in then a number of Gent went to Major Parkers hut in the fourth where we spent the evening very merily.

And on the morning after, he wrote:

16 my head achd very badly this morning occasioned by my last nights frolic.

This shows definitely that a play was given on April 15 at the Bakehouse, which drew such a large crowd that George Ewing, who had a ticket, was not able to get in, and had to amuse himself otherwise. It is reasonable to suppose that plays were given between April 15 and May 11, when a letter tells of a performance of *Cato*—a fitting choice for an army of freedom, because of its strong republican sentiment.[5] On Thursday, May 14, William Bradford wrote to his sister Rachel:

The Camp could now afford you some entertainment. The manoeuvering of the Army is in itself a sight that would charm you— Besides these the Theatre is opened— Last Monday Cato was performed before a very numerous and splendid audience. His Excellency and Lady, Lord Sterling, the Countess and Lady Kitty, and Mrs. Green were part of the assembly. The Scenery was in Taste—and the performance admirable—Col George did his part to admiration—he made an excellent *die* (as they say)— Pray heaven, he dont *die* in earnest—for yesterday he was seized with the pleurisy and he's extremely ill— If the enemy does not retire from Philad[a]. soon, our Theatrical amusements will continue— The Fair Penitent with The Padlock will soon be acted. The 'recruiting officer' is also on foot.—I hope however we shall be disappointed in all these by the more agreeable Entertainment of taking possession of Philad[a]. There are strong rumors that the English are meditating a retreat— Heaven send it—for I fear we shall not be able to force them to go these two months.[6]

Six days later, on May 20, Bradford wrote to his sister, "I no longer invite you here—all is hurry and bustle—our plays and other amusements

[5] On the sesqui-centennial of this performance, a revival of *Cato* was given at Valley Forge, with appropriate historical pageantry, and with great success.

[6] ALS. Wallace Papers (Bradford), 1.58.

seem to be laid aside and every one is preparing for a sudden movement." [7]

From these happily preserved accidental records, one may conjecture that, in spite of the recommendations of Congress against "plays and other expensive Diversions and Entertainments," American officers were giving plays much of the time they were at Valley Forge.

When they took possession of Philadelphia, they resumed the production of plays. Again the record is haphazard. Durang, who apparently relied on the memory of John North, caretaker of the Southwark, says that the theatre was open in September and October, 1778, and that "a theatrical company performed there." Though the actors are unknown, "they were probably amateurs, with one or two of the old actors." Mr. and Mrs. Allen and Mr. Goodman are, Durang says, supposed to have stayed in Philadelphia during the Revolution.[8] A copy of *The Lying Valet* now in the Library of Congress, published in Philadelphia in 1778, says on its title page, "Printed at the Desire of some of the Officers in the American Army, who intend to exhibit at the Playhouse, for the Benefit of Families who have suffered in the War for American Liberty." And a letter from Gerard de Rayneval, first French Minister to the United States,[9] says, "The Philadelphia papers contain two resolutions passed by Congress. . . . The second is a renewal of the request made by the States to interdict dances, spectacles and races. The very day [October 12 [10]] this resolution was published a public (theatrical) performance, given by army officers and Whig citizens, was to take place. The following day the Governor of Philadelphia gave a ball, numerously attended. Congress, finding that its simple recommendation was not a law, prepared a resolution on the 16th to enforce it."

So it is obvious that American officers and others were producing plays at the Theatre in Southwark in the autumn of 1778. On October 16, Congress took the following action:

Whereas frequenting Play Houses and theatrical entertainments, has a fatal tendency to divert the minds of the people from a due attention to the means necessary for the defence of their country and preservation of their liberties:

[7] *Ibid.*, 1.59.

[8] Durang, Chap. XI, Series 1.

[9] Written Nov. 24, 1778; preserved in the French Archives; quoted here from John Durand, *New Materials for The History of the American Revolution,* N. Y., 1889, p. 166.

[10] *Journals of the Continental Congress,* Vol. XII, 1778, Oct. 12 and 16.

Resolved, that any person holding an office under the United States, who shall act, promote, encourage or attend such plays, shall be deemed unworthy to hold such office, and shall be accordingly dismissed.[10]

The newspapers mention the theatre only in a "human interest" story. The *Packet* said that on the very day of Congress's resolution, The Marquis de la Fayette, ignorant of that action, invited the President of Congress to go with him to the theatre. The President was sorry, but he had to refuse. Lafayette was urgent. But when the President finally told him that Congress had resolved to dismiss anyone who went to the theatre, the Frenchman took it with good grace. "Ah! replied the Marquis, have Congress passed such a resolution! Then I will not go to the play." Lafayette's patriotic abstinence may be said to be the final gesture of the first important epoch of Philadelphia's theatrical history.

CHAPTER III

PROHIBITIONS, THE OLD AMERICAN COMPANY AND THE NEW THEATRE

1779–1799

THE SECOND era of Philadelphia's stage history began, as did the first, with opposition to the theatre. We have seen that formerly, when the Assembly of the Province had passed prohibitive laws, the Crown in Council had promptly repealed them. Now, however, the crown had lost the power to veto the acts of Pennsylvania. The legislature took advantage of its new freedom, and on March 30, 1779, passed a law prohibiting the building of "any play house, theatre, stage or scaffold for acting, showing or exhibiting any tragedy, comedy or tragi-comedy, farce, interlude or other play or any part of a play whatsoever," and the acting or being "in any way concerned" in them or any of them. This law created a disturbing social situation, which lasted for ten years.

In 1779, however, the ethical and political problems raised were not acute. The war was on, and Pennsylvania had concerns more clamorous than that of preserving its right to be entertained. Though the Theatre in Southwark was opened from February 11 to April 28, 1780, by a Mr. Templeton, who gave performances on the slack wire, there was apparently no dramatic effort [1] until January 2, 1782, when a Frenchman, Alexander Quesnay, with a number of "young gentlemen, students" of the French language, presented Beaumarchais' *Eugénie* (in French) and *The Lying Valet* at the Southwark to a "brilliant assemblage" including George Washington and the Minister of France. The performance was successful, and Quesnay announced "by request" for January 11 a second night for *Eugénie,* with the farce of *The Cheat of Scapin*: for the benefit of "the virtuous American Soldiery in the Bar-

[1] Unless one chooses to classify Francis Hopkinson's "Oratorial Entertainment," *The Temple of Minerva,* as drama rather than music. It was given on Dec. 11, 1781, at the "hotel of the minister of France." See the *Freeman's Journal,* Dec. 19, 1781, and Sonneck, *Francis Hopkinson,* pp. 106–111.

racks of Philadelphia" and the poor in the Pennsylvania Hospital. But Mr. Quesnay reckoned without the blue laws. On January 8 he was forced to announce "that no public Play will be exhibited at the Theatre in Southwark, on Friday evening, nor any Exhibition made contrary to Law." He added the curious note that he "was also mistaken with respect to the Soldiery."

One "Maria Flutter," who had enjoyed *Eugénie,* wrote to the columnist of the *Freeman's Journal,* "But, O sir! judge what must have been my melancholy, when, as I afterwards heard, Mr. Quesnay was threatened with the law if he had any more plays acted. Do, sir, say something in favour of plays." The "Pilgrim," after ironically chiding her for simply enjoying the drama, and prohibiting her "from ever attending plays 'till she is able to collect a number of useful morals and rational sentiments," feared that the time was not yet ready for an open theatre: "Have patience, madam, 'till the war is successfully finished."

RETURNING ACTORS

There were others, however, who wanted the theatre opened. John Henry returned from Jamaica, and after a visit to Maryland came to Philadelphia armed with a letter of introduction to President Moore of the Supreme Executive Council, which he presented with a request on July 1, 1782. Finding "our Theatre here entirely out of repair, and a debt for ground rent and taxes incurred to the amount of £174/7/6," he asked permission "for one night only . . . to deliver a Lecture on Heads, . . . for the purpose of paying the above debt." His request was refused. A year later, in November, 1783, Dennis Ryan—who had succeeded to the management of the Baltimore theatre after Lindsay and Wall's régime, that is, early in 1783—attempted to open the Theatre in Southwark. His petition to the Assembly for a repeal of the prohibitory law was opposed by a "Memorial and Remonstrance from the people called Quakers." [2] The Assembly tabled Ryan's petition, so chloroforming it.

Early in 1784 Lewis Hallam returned to the city (he and John Henry had become separated during the Revolution) and, on behalf

[2] See *Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council,* Nov. 10, 1783, and *Pa. Archives,* Vol. X, 141–3. It is not quite clear whether there were two petitions, one from the Quakers and one from other "Inhabitants of the City" (as Seilhamer assumes, II, 162), or two records of the same petition.

of himself and "the comedians, commonly called the American Company," prayed for the repeal of the restraining law, and suggested that the theatre be taxed. His request was accompanied by "Divers recommendatory certificates, signed by a considerable number of the inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia and its vicinity." Counter-petitions from the Quakers (who I fear played the villains in this eighteenth-century drama) were promptly presented, and a motion in the Assembly "that a committee be appointed to bring in a bill, repealing" the anti-theatrical law, was defeated, 41 to 21, on February 18, 1784.

OUTSIDE THE LAW

The next five years, 1784–1789, constitute one of the most unfortunate and interesting periods in the history of our stage. The law prohibiting the theatre was in effect, and its supporters, numbering many of the most conspicuously moral citizens, intended to see that it stayed in effect. On the other hand, the number of those desiring the drama was increasing; and for a number of years the city was in an unfortunate situation. Many of the best citizens wanted to see plays; but there was a law against them. The result was perhaps inevitable. The law was evaded by garbling theatrical performances as concerts and obviously moral lectures, and the theatre was patronized by the best people in the city, from George Washington down. For years a seemingly futile struggle was kept up for the repeal of the prohibition, finally ending in victory in 1789.

Defeated in his purpose to get the theatre licensed for plays, Lewis Hallam opened the Theatre in Southwark between April 1 and June 9, 1784, and resorted to border-line performances. It is impossible to be sure exactly what was given this season, and the newspaper announcements were infrequent. There is, for example, no announcement between May 11 and June 9, though on May 22 General Washington "purchased four Play Tickets." The advertisements promised "A Lecture Upon Heads," or "Strictures upon the most eminent Dramatic Authors . . . diversified with Music, Scenery, and other Decorations." No actors' names appeared for a number of years. Durang says[3] that the company included (at least in 1785) John Durang (the historian's father), a dancer, "who, being a native citizen, was always received with applause," Mrs. Allen, "a pleasing vocalist," Charles Busselot,

[3] Chap. XI, Series 1.

"ex-officer in the guards of Louis XVI," who married Miss Caroline Durang, "a vocalist," and the then managers, Hallam and Allen. John Henry succeeded Allen as co-manager in 1785.

Leaving the city in June, the company returned in the winter and played from December 7, 1784, to July 29, 1785. The announcements were still carefully veiled, promising "Lectures," and occasionally a "pantomimical finale" or a "dialogue and dum shew [sic]." The announcement of the "Lectures" for December 7 repays reading as a literary puzzle.

LECTURES

Being a mixed Entertainment of Representation and Harmony, with the Monody divided into three parts:

First. A *serious* investigation of Shakespear's morality, illustrated by his most striking characters, faithfully applied to the test of *mingling profit with amusement.* On the first evening, the instability of human greatness; the unavoidable and miserable consequences of vice; the piercings of a wounded conscience, and the divine attributes of mercy, will be represented according to the animated descriptions of the illustrious bard.

Second. A poetical introduction to a display of characters, *comic* and *satyric;* in which those light follies and foibles that escape more serious animadversion, will be exposed to the lash of ridicule, and a science of innocent mirth opened to the heart, without sacrificing sense to laughter, or decency to wit. The impertinence of the fine gentleman, the profligacy of the rake, the humor of the low, and the vanity of the high will be ludicrously portrayed in a variety of shapes, and the forced satyr happily directed to the nobler purpose of admonition.

Third. A dissertation on the passions, shewing the different complexions they assume, and their various modes of expression, according to the circumstance of Character and situation.—Love and jealousy.—Humanity and libertinism.—Pride and poverty—often uniting in the same heart, but rarely appearing in the same garb.

The vocal part of the Monody by a LADY. And the whole Entertainment will be closed by

A RONDELAY

Celebrating the Independence of America. *Music,* Scenery and *other Decorations.*

The actors went to New York in August, 1785, and did not appear again in Philadelphia till January, 1787. While they were gone, the

Legislature, on September 25, 1786, conscious that the law had "not been fully and duly executed and enforced throughout this state," changed its form somewhat, the penalty now being two hundred pounds for every offense, and extended the prohibition to include pantomime.

The Old American Company, as the troupe, now managed by Hallam and Henry, was called (though it cautiously did not so advertise itself in the papers [4]) returned to the city in January, 1787, and though it at first said that it was here "For Six Nights Only," gave fifteen performances between January 15 and February 3. (The opening was postponed from January 8.) The entertainments were still veiled, announced as Concerts and Lectures, but the veil was thinner. Pantomimes were openly advertised, in spite of the new clause in the law, and when it was said, as on January 22, that in the pantomime would be "introduced a *Musical* Entertainment; called Darby and Patrick; With (by particular desire) the OVERTURE to the Poor Soldier," the initiated probably knew that O'Keeffe's musical farce, *The Poor Soldier*, was meant. The legal assumption evidently was that the law did not cover opera—later in the year the Southwark (this season called "the Theatre in South street") was called "The Opera House in Southwark." Among the new "operas" probably indicated by the announcements were *The Agreeable Surprize* and *Rosina;* soon afterwards, both were advertised for sale in book form.

On June 25, 1787, the Theatre in Southwark became "the Opera-House." Though the managers at first announced a stay of only a fortnight, the playhouse remained open till August 4. Each entertainment was announced as "Spectaculum Vitae," and the plays were called moral tales. For example, on July 25 "a Moral and Instructive TALE called FILIAL PIETY: Exemplified in the HISTORY of the Prince of Denmark" was promised. That the less well read might get the point, a passage beginning "What a Piece of Work is Man" was quoted, and as a final clue, there was the tag in very fine print, "Shakespear's Hamlet." This particular moral tale was later postponed "on account of the indisposition of Mr. Morris," which shows that he was with the company. There is little risk in assuming that *The School for Scandal* was produced during the season (for the first time in the city), though the tale advertised was *"The Pernicious Vice of Scandal."*

After this season, the Old American Company did not return to

[4] See Seilhamer, II, 176.

Philadelphia till June, 1788. However, on December 1, 1787, Thomas Wignell, later co-manager of the New Theatre in Chesnut Street, gave a public reading of *The Contrast* at the City Tavern—thus introducing the first American comedy to Philadelphia. Its author, Royall Tyler, had given Wignell the copyright of the play.

In March, 1788, Hallam and Henry again petitioned the Assembly for a repeal of the law against acting. The Assembly appointed a committee of investigation, which brought back a report favorable to the petition. In so doing, the committeemen insisted that they were not "in the least influenced by any particular or personal wish for the establishment of a theatre." But they felt it "the part of integrity to propose their genuine sentiments" on such an important matter, though it was foreseen that those sentiments would differ from other beliefs held by "many persons truly estimable for their moral and religious virtues." The committee's most important conclusion was that, though the foreign yoke in government was cast off, we should "still be dependent for those productions which do most honor to human nature, until we can afford due protection and encouragement to every species of our own literature." They moved that a theatre be licensed. The motion was tabled.

The following summer, from June 23 to July 26, 1788, a season of fifteen nights was played at the theatre, with the announcements of the plays only slightly disguised. The most important new play was *She Stoops to Conquer,* or rather, *"A Lecture on the Disadvantages of Improper Education, Exemplified in the History of* TONY LUMPKIN." *"The Columbian Father;* Written by a Citizen of the United States" was also introduced. The season included *Hamlet, Richard III, The West Indian,* and *The School for Scandal.* While it was in progress, the Quakers did their duty by petitioning President Franklin to redeem the honor of the "righteous administration of government," which was being "insulted by the open contravention of the Law in the exhibition of Stage Plays, under whatsoever evasive name disguised." The Friends of course were quite right; the situation was intolerable, and its climax not distant.

Before the brief autumn season of 1788 at the "Opera-House in Southwark," *George Barnwell* was announced for October 25 at the "Concert Hall in the Northern Liberties." As the Old American Company opened in Southwark two days later, it is possible that some of its members offered *George Barnwell;* or the unannounced performers

may have been led by Mr. Partridge, who appeared there in November, 1789.

The "Opera-House" was open for ten nights from October 27 to November 15, 1788. Those who patronized the law-breaking players, (and it was said that "not less than from 700 to 800 citizens . . . many . . . of rank the most respectable," [4a] did) saw the first Philadelphia productions of *The Rivals, The Countess of Salisbury,* and *The School for Wives,* as well as the reappearing *Henry IV, Lear, Richard III, The Beaux' Stratagem, The Provoked Husband, The West Indian,* and *The School for Scandal,* with several afterpieces.

THE DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION

The conflict caused by the law prohibiting plays now became acute. The war for independence had been won, no "emergency" existed, and the question as to whether a determined minority could write its notions of morality into the law of the state had to be faced. On November 7, 1788, the Quakers again recited their grievances, and remonstrated with the Assembly "against theatrical exhibitions being tolerated by law"; and on November 12, Hallam and Henry prayed that the committee's report from last March "be taken into consideration, and a license granted." Fuel was added to the fire by the Overseers of the Poor, who brought suit against the players as subject to fine for breaking the law. From one point of view their action was defensible, as any fines collected from the actors (£200 apiece per performance!) would have gone for poor relief; [5] on the other hand, as many of the citizens observed,[6] the prosecution came with particularly bad grace from the Overseers, as the company had made a practice of giving a benefit for the poor nearly every season.

At the height of the struggle, a Dramatic Association was formed "for the Purpose of obtaining the Establishment of a Theatre in Philadelphia, under a liberal and properly regulated plan." [7] The Dramatic

[4a] "Anti-persecutos" in *Pa. Packet,* Dec. 23, 1788.

[5] W. C. Heffner, *History of Poor Relief Legislation in Pennsylvania, 1682–1913,* p. 131. (Cleona, Pa., 1913.) The upshot of this suit was that the Overseers agreed to accept a benefit on April 10, 1790, "in lieu of any penalty that may have been incurred."

[6] See letters in *Pa. Packet,* Dec. 6, 23, 30, 1788.

[7] See *Packet,* Jan. 9, 19, Feb. 3, 17, 1789; *American Museum,* Feb., 1789; *Minutes of the General Assembly,* Feb. 16, 1789.

Association was a civic movement, the voice of the best liberal element in the growing city, of those interested in the arts and in political rights. On its active committee were General Walter Stewart, Major T. I. Moore, William Temple Franklin, Dr. Robert Bass, John Barclay, Jacob Barge, Dr. Joseph Redman, James Crawford, and John West. Mrs. Bingham was active in its support. "The characters of our most distinguished citizens were pledged for the respectable establishment of the Theatre." [8] Managers Hallam and Henry promised that, if the theatre were allowed to open legally, they would strengthen the company by the addition of "good performers from Europe." [9]

On February 16, 1789, the Dramatic Association gave to the Legislature a statement of rights which is one of the important social landmarks of America. Unfortunately it is much too long to be quoted here in full.[10] It argues that those opposed to the drama have no right to prohibit the theatre, and that those for whom drama does have intelligent meaning as artistic recreation should not "sacrifice that opinion, merely in compliment to the prejudices of those of their fellow citizens, who think this, as they do every other amusement, contrary to the laws of conscience and virtue." The heart of their statement is summed up in words which have not grown archaic:

> While . . . we cannot admit, that a theatre is the temple of vice, we presume not to insist that it is the school of virtue. As a rational amusement, it is the object of our wishes; and the whole force of our reasoning is directed only to shew, that those who regard it in a contrary light, are not entitled to controul our sentiments or to compel the adoption of what they profess. If, indeed, a mere difference of opinion, shall be thought a sufficient foundation to curtail our rights, and diminish our enjoyments, the boasted liberality of the present age, will be eclipsed by a comparison with the furious bigotry of the middle centuries; and the same authority which proscribes our amusements may with equal justice, dictate the shape and texture of our dress, or the modes and ceremonies of our worship.

From the appeal to reason, the struggle went to the appeal to numbers. Petitions for and against the theatre circulated through the city, and, with long lists of signers, were presented to the legislature. Nineteen hundred names wanted the theatre on February 6; ten days later,

[8] *General Advertiser,* Feb. 23, 1791.

[9] *Federal Gazette,* Feb. 5, 1791.

[10] For the full text, see *Pa. Packet,* Feb. 17, 1789, and *Am. Museum,* Feb., 1789.

3446 names did not. In four more days, 3780 were for it, and 729 against. There were remonstrances and counter-remonstrances. Finally, on March 2, 1789, the Dramatic Association was successful, and "any act or part of an act which prohibits theatrical representations" was repealed "within the city of Philadelphia and the neighbourhood thereof." That the respectability of the stage might be assured, the executive and judicial heads of the state were given the power for the next three years to suppress any "exceptionable" plays.

UNVEILED PLAYS

During the struggle the Old American Company, under its own name, had given "An Entertainment" on January 9, and announced another for February 2, which it withdrew. As soon as the law was repealed, it opened the theatre and gave fifteen plays, again "By Authority," between March 9 and April 4, the company leaving then only because it was due at the John Street Theatre in New York. *Much Ado About Nothing,* "Never performed here," was given, as well as Burgoyne's *The Heiress,* also new. A number of dependable plays reappeared. For the first time in over fifteen years, casts were published, and we can be sure that Lewis Hallam, still the leading actor, played the Romeo and the Benedict. Mrs. Henry (it was Maria now) was the leading lady, when she appeared, as she did in Juliet. Mrs. Morris had more good parts (Beatrice, Maria, Lydia Languish, Lady Teazle), perhaps because she was more willing to work. Mr. Wignell, who was especially a broad comedian, and Mr. Henry took leading rôles, and Mr. Morris in low comedy again shook the gallery.

Late in 1789, five performances were given between November 4 and 30 in "Harmony Hall, Northern-Liberties, near Poole's Bridge," by a picked-up company led by a Mr. Partridge (or Patridge), and including John Durang, the dancer. It is not certain whether "Harmony Hall" was or was not another name for the Theatre in the Northern Liberties, also near Poole's Bridge, which was used in a long season during 1791–92. The only full-length play attempted during these five November nights was *The Beaux' Stratagem.*

CRITICAL AUDIENCES

The Old American Company reopened the Theatre in Southwark on January 6, 1790, and played a long season till July 19. The managers

tried in a number of ways to make the old theatre more attractive. In January it was too cold, and they closed it for ten days for "Alterations and Improvements." They changed the pit entrance from the north side to the east. They made "a new brick Pavement . . . from Lombard street to the door of the theatre." They removed the gallery door "from the North side to the West side." In July, when it got too hot, they put up "A Wind Sail . . . for the purpose of keeping the House Cool." The next summer they had fire engines playing water on the roof.

In more significant matters, however, they were apparently not so active. In spite of their promise to the Dramatic Association that they would get new players from England, there was no improvement in the company. But the wrath of the public, happy in a fat season after so many lean, did not descend on them yet. Durang tells us[11] that "the business was excellent"— Mrs. Bingham and her coterie "often adorned the dingy-papered boxes of the old South." Four of the new plays produced were American: *The Contrast* (which Wignell had read to the city in 1787), Dunlap's *The Father,* John Henry's *The School for Soldiers* and Humphreys' *The Widow of Malabar.* There were newspapers every day now, and the record is without the colonial gaps, though the Old American Company did not often give casts in the papers—perhaps believing that silence was the better advertising.

At any rate, in the next season, December 8, 1790, to July 11, 1791, there were many complaints from the citizens that the company, only adequate at best, too often did not present its full strength. The criticisms were especially strong against Maria Henry, admittedly excellent in singing rôles and a great favorite when she wished to be, but capricious and disdainful of her public, often refusing to appear or playing negligently in minor parts. Just how much truth there was in the charges it is impossible now to say, especially in the absence of casts, but there is no doubt that many in the audience felt sure that her inattention was willful. A number of plays were postponed, and Hallam and Henry parried rather than met criticism. The truth seems to be that the managers had become so used to a grateful public's taking what it could get that they did not consider the rumblings of the storm serious. And good new actors might mean (when Hodgkinson came, they did mean) that Lewis Hallam, the theatrical idol of colonial

[11] Chap. XIV, Series 1.

America, would have to give up some of his youthful rôles—precious property. Henry was far from blameless, but there is no doubt that Hallam in especial (unlike his wise stepfather, David Douglass) was a penurious and time-serving manager, more interested in his own success than his company's. Toward the end of this turbulent season the managers put forward two new actresses, Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Gee, who were well received, but were not important. There were spectators who, rather mildly, defended the managers, or attacked their attackers,[12] but when a meeting of those interested in subscribing to "building a Theatre in a central part of the city" was announced on May 2, the eventual result was the New Theatre in Chesnut Street.

Mr. Wignell, later the manager of the New Theatre, left the Old American Company at the end of this season, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Morris. Wignell was a very popular actor, and Henry was jealous.[13] There was strife, too, between the wives. Someone had to go to England to get new players. Hallam, it appears, had promised Wignell that he, Wignell, should go; then it was publicly announced that Henry, jealous of Wignell and one of the managers, would be the envoy. Wignell called for a showdown: he was a "sharer" and the treasurer, but at the mercy of the managers who controlled the casting: if co-manager Henry brought back a new comedian and gave him Wignell's parts, Wignell would be ruined. Either he must be allowed to buy into the management on a par with Hallam and Henry, or it must be he who was sent to England. Hallam and Henry refused the alternatives. Wignell resigned, joined with Alexander Reinagle as manager of the New Theatre, and the next year went to England for his own (the New Theatre's) company.

Wignell's leaving brought to an end the "sharing" system, which had been in force since the Comedians from London first reached America in 1752. The last sharing members were Hallam, Mr. and Mrs. Henry, Wignell, Mr. and Mrs. Morris, and Woolls.[14] In the future the actors (except, of course, the managers) were all on salary, though the system of actors' benefits was still in force, with its dangerously speculative influence on stage economics.

[12] For some of the letters pro and con this season see *The Federal Gazette,* Feb. 5, March 16; *General Advertiser,* Feb. 16, 18, 21, 23, 26, Mar. 1, 5, April 15, 21, 30, May 2, 9, 21, June 2, 13, 1791.

[13] Dunlap, 90–92, gives the story in some detail.

[14] Durang, Chap. XV.

The season of 1790–91 was also important for the theatrical criticism which was published. There had been sporadic criticism before, but from now on it grew to be a customary part of journalism. For example, the *General Advertiser* in reviewing *She Stoops to Conquer* (April 15) said:

> Mrs. Morris performed in Miss Hardcastle with truth and great animation: We wish we could say as much of Miss Tuke in Miss Nevil. Nothing appeared to move her;—not even unexpectedly meeting with her lover. Mr. Wignell in Tony Lumpkin . . . entered fully into the spirit of the character, and performed every part of it with great humor.

Among the few new plays this season were *Constitutional Follies,* by Mr. Robinson, one of the actors, and Bickerstaff's *The Recess,* "Revised and altered by a Citizen of Philadelphia." (A long synopsis of the latter and a criticism of it as drama appeared in the *General Advertiser* for April 30 and May 2, 1791.)

THE "K" COMPANY

While the Old American Company was playing in Southwark a "New American Company" opened the Northern Liberty (or Liberties) Theatre on April 8, 11, 26, and 30. This was in Front Street, below Noble—"a small wooden theatre . . . on the wharf up at Noble street." [15] The title "New American Company" later disappeared, and as Mr. Kenna, Mrs. Kenna, Miss Kenna, Mr. Kelly, and Mr. and Mrs. Kedey, as well as the J. Kennas, appeared, it is simpler to follow Seilhamer in calling them the "K" company.

In July, when the Theatre in Southwark had closed, the "K" company began a season running from July 25, 1791, to May 16, 1792. (During the summer they appeared on alternate nights as actors at the Northern Liberties and as singers and dancers at George Esterly's Vauxhall Gardens, at "Harrowgate"—Broad and Walnut.) Mr., Mrs., and Miss Kenna, who had been with the Old American Company in New York in 1787,[16] before starting the new company, were the heart of the troupe, with Mrs. Kenna evidently the leading performer. A number of new actors appeared, many for a very short time and some

[15] Watson, *Annals,* I, 473.
[16] Odell, I, 254.

of them amateurs: on May 11, for example, "a Gentleman for his Amusement" was announced. During the season a company of French dancers, who occasionally gave pantomimes, appeared with the "K" Company, and later a company of tumblers, jugglers, and slack-wire performers led by a Mr. Donegani. Mr. Godwin, who had been with the American Company in 1766, turned up again on April 14, 1792, playing Jaffier in *Venice Preserved*. The list of plays given is quite respectable, including eight new titles, none very important, and nineteen old favorites, as well as a number of afterpieces, old and new.

NEW THEATRE BEGUN

Mr. Wignell had gone to England, and sent back "the most favourable accounts of his success in obtaining performers for the New Theatre." [17] A company of citizens had been formed to erect the building.[18] A lot on the north side of Chesnut above Sixth had been secured, and in February, 1792, some of the materials for building were already there, and the public was expectantly waiting "to see the Drama in a more perfect state than had hitherto been known in America." In June a model of the proposed theatre reached the city, and was "exhibited for the gratification of the curious." [19]

In the summer of 1792 the Old American Company gave a short season at the Southwark from May 28 to July 2. Without the services of Mr. Henry, who had gone to England for new performers (the secession of Mr. Wignell had finally forced the issue), Mr. and Mrs. Morris, and Mr. Wignell, the company was very weak, and relied on a French troupe of tumblers, dancers, and pantomimists, led by M. Placide, to draw the crowd. As a result, no new plays were given, but instead they offered a number of new pantomimes, ballets, and "dancing ballads"—which were becoming constantly more popular. The only new "legitimate" afterpiece was Robinson's farce (first given in New York in April), *The Yorker's Stratagem*.

[17] *Daily Advertiser*, Feb. 13, 1792.

[18] The original proposal, signed by the subscribers, is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. At first there were to be sixty shares at $300 each; on June 2, 1792, forty more shares were added (the first date is not distinguishable; it was probably late in 1791). Wignell and Reinagle were responsible for everything but the actual lot and building.

[19] *Pa. Gazette*, June 20, 1792.

After a brief season in Lancaster,[20] the Old American Company returned to the Southwark on September 26, 1792, playing through till January 12, 1793. On the opening night Mr. and Mrs. Hodgkinson, Mr. King, Mr. Prigmore, and Mr. West, some of the new performers John Henry had secured in England, appeared for the first time in America. John Hodgkinson was the most important—"a prodigy," Durang called him[21]—a fine actor, with boundless ambition, bottomless ignorance, and tremendous energy. The managers who had tried to suppress the competition of Wignell soon found themselves saddled with a popular actor who wanted to play all the good parts—theirs included—and trouble naturally followed. Mrs. Hodgkinson was also important. The *Aurora* of September 28 said that in her, "Mrs. Henry, at last, finds a rival worthy of her vocal abilities." She was a very capable general actress. Mrs. Pownall (sometime Mrs. Wrighten), who appeared ten days later, was an older actress, with an excellent singing voice. Prigmore, the buffoon, did not succeed as the managers had hoped in taking Wignell's place in popular favor. A few new plays were presented this season, with *The Road to Ruin, The Child of Nature,* and *He Would Be a Soldier* probably the best. At the close of the season, Lewis Hallam married Eliza Tuke,[22] and the backstage difficulties of the Old American Company grew yet more madly complicated.

In the meantime, with the public waiting impatiently, work was being pushed on the New Theatre. While Wignell was still in England getting his players, on February 2, 1793, the New Theatre in Chesnut Street, "nearly completed," was opened with "a grand Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music." Five days later another concert was given, after which the theatre was closed "till further notice." (Its dramatic opening was on February 17, 1794.) All during the spring there was no drama, and the public was told of Wignell's strenuous efforts and asked to wait patiently if it wanted perfection.[23]

It was perfection Philadelphia sought, and the theatre rising west of Sixth and Chesnut was to be, as the Annalist of the New York Stage later said, "incomparably the finest home of the drama in America." Designed by Richards, a London artist (Wignell's brother-

[20] *Federal Gazette,* Oct. 10, 1792.
[21] Chap. XVII, Series 1.
[22] On January 14, 1793. See *Daily Adv.,* Jan. 17.
[23] *Daily Adv.,* May 6.

in-law), it was a copy of the Royal Theatre at Bath. A stately front stretched for ninety feet along Chesnut Street, flanked by two fifteen-feet wings. The extreme depth of one hundred and thirty-four feet allowed the stage to run back for seventy-one feet from the footlights. The interior, handsomely furnished, somewhat resembled a modern opera house, with two horseshoe tiers of boxes, or "lodges." The boxes accommodated nine hundred people, and when boxes, pit, and gallery were full, the house held an audience of two thousand. The stage, thirty-six feet wide between the front boxes, could be seen from any part of the house. The actors had a grateful number of dressing-rooms, two greenrooms (one for the youngsters and one more dignified), and, for the first time in America, there was a large and well-stocked wardrobe, with a wardrobe keeper.[24] From both sides of the footlights it was an excellent and spacious theatre.[25]

After a season in New York, the Old American Company opened the Southwark on July 1, 1793, but was compelled by the spread of yellow fever to close it on August 23. No casts were announced in the papers, but the company was doubtless much as it had been when it left in January, save that Hodgkinson was assuming more and more power. By next May in New York he had forced John Henry out entirely, buying his half interest in the company for £4000.[26] John Henry and Maria Storer Henry, who had been with the American Company a quarter of a century before, did not play in Philadelphia again.[27]

WIGNELL'S RECRUITS

When Thomas Wignell got back from England in the summer of 1793 with "a company of performers, consisting of fifty-six men, women,

[24] Durang, Chap. XXX, Series 1.

[25] For a contemporary account, see the *Daily Advertiser* for February 4, 1794.

[26] J. Hodgkinson, *Narrative of His Connection with the Old American Company*, N. Y., 1797, p. 5. Henry sold to Hallam, and Hallam to Hodgkinson. It appears that Hallam sold less than he bought, as the buyer later discovered. See Dunlap, 112–113.

[27] John Henry died at sea on his way to Rhode Island, Oct. 16, 1794, and after a hasty burial on the shore, his body was removed to "a vault in the graveyard of St. James Church at Bristol." *Daily Adv.*, Jan. 10, 1795. Mrs. Maria Henry died April 28, 1795, in her house back of the old Southwark Theatre. *Daily Adv.*, April 30.

and children," he found the city plagued by yellow fever, and took the players to Sandtown, New Jersey, till the danger was past.[28]

The plague in Philadelphia had been very bad, and the Quakers, suspecting its cause (with a huge new theatre going up and a load of stage-players ready to act in it), called on the Legislature when it met again (on December 2[29]) for "the absolute suppression and prohibition of those injurious and reproachful exhibitions" as a token of obedience to "the dispenser of life, health and happiness." They did their best to revive the war against the theatre,[30] but that fight had been fought, and "Plain Truth" reminded them bluntly that the Legislature had a duty to guard rights as well as morals.[31]

The New Theatre was finally opened with drama on February 17, 1794, and the season continued till July 18. Wignell's Company (which had played a few nights in Annapolis while waiting for the Philadelphia opening) was, with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Morris and Mr. Wignell, entirely new. With James Fennell, a great tragedian and vagrant genius, at its head, it was in the opinion of all critics the finest dramatic and operatic corps that America had seen. In all, thirty-eight new actors appeared this season. Mrs. Oldmixon (the Miss George of the London stage) was one of the most distinguished, an excellent singing actress. John Pollard Moreton was the leading high comedian. John Harwood was (as both Durang and Dunlap phrase it) "one of the brightest ornaments" of the company. Mrs. Whitlock, a sister of Mrs. Siddons, was the leading tragic actress in the country—the Lady Macbeth to Fennell's Macbeth, the Imogen to his Posthumous. Mr. Chalmers, "engaged as the genteel comedian," though popular was not up to their level; however, he later took some excellent parts, both tragic and comic. ("Originally a Harlequin," Durang says,[32] he "never could play a part without a jump or turn in it.") Mrs. Marshall "was the *beau ideal* of a comic actress, and . . . *au fait* in every walk of the drama—nay, she was excellent. Her romps were a model of perfection." In the large company was Mrs. Susannah Haswell Rowson, the author of *Charlotte Temple;* for her benefit on June 30 she

[28] James Fennell, *An Apology for the Life of James Fennell,* Phila., 1814, p. 334.

[29] *Daily Adv.,* Dec. 13, 1793.

[30] See *Daily Adv.,* Dec. 23, 24, 31, 1793; Jan. 2, 1794.

[31] *Daily Adv.,* Dec. 18, 1793.

[32] Chap. XXI, Series 1.

wrote *Slaves in Algiers*. Her husband was the prompter this season.

The company, jointly managed by Thomas Wignell and Alexander Reinagle, the latter a musician and leader of the orchestra, was as strong in opera as in drama—it opened with O'Keeffe's comic opera, *The Castle of Andalusia*. Mr. Reinagle often contributed new music, and Mr. De Marque worked as compiler, while Mr. Milbourne was the scenic artist. Pantomime and ballet were also very popular. Mr. Francis, a dancer and pantomimist, and Mme. Gardie, danseuse from Paris, whose tragic end was not yet, delighted the audience. The company had been chosen so that it would be strong in all its departments. And it is important to notice that though James Fennell played all the tragic rôles and captured the imagination of the city, he was happily not yet a "star"; Wignell's was an excellent stock company.

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were still the regular theatre nights, and a box seat cost one dollar, while a seat in the pit was "three-quarters of a dollar," and one in the gallery, half a dollar. Servants still came early to hold their masters' "lodge" seats. Much pertinent criticism was appearing. The critic of the *General Advertiser,* reviewing Kelly's *The School for Wives* on March 24, said that it, "like most of the modern English comedies, fails of interest through want of more unity, distinctness, and connection in the plot. The aim of the author has been to expose certain follies and vices; but he has undertaken the reformation of too many at a time. Besides, the play is not a mirrour for an American audience.—This to be sure is a fault common to most transatlantic productions of this nature," though of course "many good sentiments are introduced throughout the play, seasonable in all ages and climes, expressed with remarkable neatness."

Thirteen plays or "operas" were introduced to the city this season, including *As You Like It;* Mrs. Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* has been mentioned. Among thirty-four reappearing plays were eight Shakespearean, as well as, for example, *Comus, The Provoked Husband, The Rivals,* and *The School for Scandal.* Of forty-seven afterpieces (farces, light operas, pantomimes, "comic ballads"), eighteen were new. It was the best season America had ever seen.

THE OLD AMERICAN COMPANY DEPARTS

At the close of their Philadelphia season, Wignell and Reinagle took the players to a new theatre they had built in Baltimore, which

they were to use regularly in the summer and early fall. The Old American Company seized the chance to open the "Theatre, Cedar Street" (the old Southwark) from September 22 to December 4, 1794. It was to be their last appearance in Philadelphia.

A number of new performers were seen, the most important of whom was Mrs. Melmoth, a tragic actress of great power, though no longer young nor slender. Mme. Gardie, who had been at the New Theatre earlier in the year, "created quite a sensation in her pantomimic acting . . . the town were in extacies [sic] with her and this species of performance." [33] The only American plays new to the city were Dunlap's *The Fatal Deception* (later called *Leicester*) and Mrs. Hatton's *Tammany*. In all there were eleven new plays, and those which reappeared were, with a few exceptions, recent, and rather light. The crowd in the gallery was bad this season; anybody within beer-bottle range was in danger.[34] When Mr. and Mrs. Hallam took their benefit on December 4, the important history of the Theatre in Southwark was over. It was fitting that President George Washington should have been there on the last night "to honor the *Old American Company* with his presence." Nevertheless, Philadelphia was fortunate that it could surrender that strifeful company to New York and Dunlap, and turn its attention to the New Theatre in Chestnut Street.

The New Theatre had been reopened the day before, on December 3, 1794, and housed a long season till July 4, 1795. Unfortunately it had for a time lost Mr. Fennell, its leading tragedian; that restless gentleman was intent on making his own and Maryland's fortune with a salt-machine he had invented.[35] Chalmers attempted to take his place in tragic rôles; but he was not Fennell. Nevertheless, it was an excellent season, dramatic and musical, with seventy-four different standard plays and operas, thirteen of which were new—and this not counting afterpieces, which were often nearly as important as the main plays. On March 21, for example, *Comus* appeared as afterpiece to *The Rivals*. Interestingly enough, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* was revived. Cumberland's *The Jew* was very popular, appearing six times. Most of the plays, old and new, were of course still English: Mrs.

[33] Durang, Series I, Chap. XXIV.

[34] See *Gen. Ad.*, Oct. 25, 1794.

[35] See J. Fennell, *Description of the Principles and Plan of Proposed Establishments of Salt Works; for the Purpose of Supplying the U. S. with Home Made Salt*, Phila., 1798.

Rowson's *The Female Patriot* and John Murdock's *The Triumphs of Love* were the only new American plays offered. Murdock, it seems, was a Philadelphia barber, and felt that there was foul play when the managers refused to revive his *The Triumphs of Love* next season, or produce his new farce.[36] There was undoubtedly too little emphasis on the development of American drama, but Murdock's was not a happy test case.

THE ART PANTHEON

Before Wignell's company returned from its season in Baltimore, The Art Pantheon, or Ricketts' Amphitheatre, was opened on the southwest corner of Sixth and Chesnut, just opposite the New Theatre. It was built like a huge circular tent of wood, ninety-seven feet in diameter, with white walls, straight for eighteen feet, slanting upward to make a conical roof fifty feet high. Primarily a circus with "equestrianism," tumbling, and pony races, it also attracted the public with a stage on which farces and pantomimes were given. "People of all classes thronged to the circus. From six to seven hundred persons filled the seats on every day of Ricketts' performances." [37] The Pantheon opened on October 19, 1795, but its stage performances this season were presented between December 22, 1795, and April 23, 1796. Five different harlequinades were given—one with the charming title, *The Triumph of Virtue, or Harlequin in Philadelphia.*

Soon after the New Theatre had opened its season from December 14, 1795, to July 1, 1796, it introduced Signior Joseph Doctor, an acrobat imported from Sadlers Wells to compete with the Pantheon across the street. His exhibitions were pointedly called "T'Other Side of the Gutter"—then later, "Both Sides of the Gutter." M. and Mme. Lege, pantomimists from the Italian Theatre in Paris, added strength to the musical and dancing departments. But in the more strictly dramatic part of the organization, no one had been secured to take Fennell's place, and in addition Chalmers, the substitute in tragedy, had left the company (though he rejoined it in May). There were no important recruits, and the public grumbled so distinctly that Manager Wignell, after taking a benefit on April 18, went to England for new actors. Though not a distinctive season, it was a good one; Philadelphia

[36] See the Introduction to J. Murdock, *The Beau Metamorphized,* Phila., 1800.

[37] Durang, Chap. XXV, Series 1. For an account of the circus as circus, see I. J. Greenwood, *The Circus, Its Origin and Growth prior to 1835,* N. Y., 1898.

was offered a large number of the best plays then on the English speaking stage, adequately presented in an excellent theatre. A "poor" season at the New Theatre in the 1790's meant simply that there was no great actor or striking success to catch the public's imagination.

The next "dramatic" season at the Pantheon extended from October 12, 1796, to February 23, 1797. Its repertory was much more ambitious than before. It gave thirty-two different entertainments, mostly pantomimic, twenty of which were new to the city. A number of the standard farces were produced—*Catherine and Petruchio, The Lying Valet, Miss in Her Teens.* Its company also was stronger now, including Mr. Chambers, who had been with the Old American Company in 1792, and his wife—both later with Wignell and Reinagle's players.

When the New Theatre began its season from December 5, 1796, to July 14, 1797 (with an intermission from May 6 to July 5), an interesting struggle occurred. Ricketts, who had been playing on any day of the week that pleased him, announced that he would resume his former schedule of Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, thus leaving the New Theatre its regular nights of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. But when Wignell and Reinagle saw the Saturday night crowds pouring into the Pantheon across the street and thought of the drains on their treasury, they opened the theatre on Saturday night, December 17, with a new French Company of Comedians giving two French comic operas in addition to the play by the regular actors. Ricketts immediately countered by announcing that as the Theatre chose to compete with him, he would be open on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights till further notice. Accordingly, the Pantheon and the New Theatre divided the crowd for over three weeks; but Wignell and Reinagle finally gave up, and announced no play for Saturday, January 14, when the old division of nights was resumed.

Wignell had been successful in England, bringing back with him Mrs. Ann Merry,[38] Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, and William Warren, as well as lesser figures. Mrs. Merry was one of the truly great actresses. John Bernard, comparing her with Mrs. Siddons (he was a good judge, and knew them both), said that Mrs. Siddons ascended to greatness in the "Queenly and thoughtful" Shakespearean heroines, while Mrs. Merry in "the loving and passionate . . . was equally perfect. . . .

[38] Sometime the Miss Brunton of the London stage; later Mrs. Thomas Wignell; later Mrs. William Warren.

With a voice that was all music, and a face all emotion, her pathos and tenderness were never exceeded."[39] Thomas A. Cooper, foster son of William Godwin and protégé of Thomas Holcroft, was at the time only twenty-one, with a genius more ambitious than developed, but he grew to be a great tragedian.[40] William Warren, later manager of the Chesnut Street Theatre, was an excellent comedian.

But on the other hand, Fennell and Chalmers were still away, and a number of other performers had gone to the new Boston Theatre—Mr. and Mrs. Whitlock, the Rowsons, Miss Broadhurst. The critics, enraptured by Mrs. Merry, strove to evaluate the new players with the old. It was an age of reason, and "Philo-Theatricus" attempted criticism as an exact science. Desiring to show that the managers had lost more than they had gained, he graded the players, "more from public, than private opinion," with 15 as an ideal score, thus:

Performers Absent		*New Performers*	
Mrs. Whitlock	13	Mrs. Merry	15
Shaw	10	Mechtler	4
Marshall	9	Miss L'Estrange	4
Cleveland	5	Mrs. L'Estrange	3
Green	4	Mr. Cooper	11
Rowson	3	Warren	9
Miss Broadhurst	10	Fox	6
Mr. Fennell	13	L'Estrange	4
Bates	12		56
Chalmers	12		
Whitlock	11		
Marshall	7		
Cleveland	5		
Green	5		
	119		

One notes Mrs. Merry's perfect 15. He graded some of the others: Mr. Moreton ("undoubtedly the only chaste male actor on the New Theatre stage"!) 13; Mr. Wignell 10; Mr. Harwood 13; Mr. Francis

[39] *Retrospections of the Stage*, N. Y., 1887.

[40] See J. N. Ireland, *A Memoir of the Professional Life of Thomas Abthorpe Cooper*, N. Y., 1888.

9; Mrs. Oldmixon 14; Mrs. Morris 8; and Mrs. Warren 9.[41] The greenroom comments on "Philo-Theatricus" must have been worth hearing.

The sensation of the season was Morton's *Columbus, or a World Discovered,* which, elaborately produced, was played nine times between January 30 and July 5—then a very long run (not, however, continuous). Morton's *The Way to Get Married* was given seven times, and a new American play, R. Merry's *The Abbey of St. Augustine,* ran for three nights. A number of new pantomimes and comic operas were given, featuring the French players and Mr. and Mrs. Byrne, who had been imported from Covent Garden.

In an effort to get their finances (which had never quite recovered from the necessity of paying full salaries to the actors in 1793, when the New Theatre could not be opened because of the yellow fever) in better shape, the managers raised the prices of the box seats to a dollar and a quarter, and of the pit to a dollar. But they did not make money, and next season had to go back to the old scale. The season was interrupted from May 6 to July 5 while the company rushed to Baltimore; a curious and temporary law there had banned the theatre for the summer, and the managers wanted to take at least the cream of a season.

A BIGGER CIRCUS

Another circus had been built—a huge place, "constructed on a scale of grandeur hitherto unknown in Philadelphia. From Fifth Street it extended westward along Prune Street to the jail wall, half a square in depth; along Fifth Street the front extended to the south wall of the present boundary of St. Thomas' Church. Above the building loomed up the mammoth proportions of a prodigious dome of large diameter, and extended in height to the altitude of ninety feet." [42] The New Theatre, which held two thousand people, looked to Dunlap "quite small after seeing Lailson's Circus." [43] The ambitious proprietor was a Frenchman, and had with him "the most splendid and well appointed double company (that is, for both stage and circus) which had ever come to America." [42] Its dramatic season extended from April 11

[41] The *Gazette of the United States,* Dec. 16, 1796. Could "Philo-Theatricus" have been the critic who used that name in 1772? See p. 30, above.

[42] Durang, XXXII, Series 1.

[43] 169.

to July 27, 1797, during which time eighteen new pantomimes, farces, and "comic ballads" were given. But Lailson's Circus was as transient as it was huge. The next spring Lailson opened on March 8 and kept going, in spite of difficulties, until April 7, when he finally realized that the enterprise was too vast, sold what he could, and returned to France. The histrionic members of his company stayed in the city [42] and joined other unattached actors (notably Chalmers) in giving scattered performances at the circuses and the Southwark between April 24 and June 8, 1798. And then one Sunday morning (July 8, 1798), "the immense dome of the circus gave way and fell to the ground between the walls, crushing the interior completely." [44]

The New Theatre began its season from December 11, 1797, to May 5, 1798, with its company further strengthened by the presence of John Bernard, an excellent comedian from England, who was an immediate success with the public.[45] James Fennell (who had given fifty-seven readings from plays at the College the winter before [46]) reappeared on January 3, as Zanga in *The Revenge,* "before as brilliant a Theatre as ever assembled in Philadelphia." [47] The boxes were crowded, the applause was long and sincere, and Philadelphia was his. The headstrong young Thomas Cooper, whose ambition had already been curbed by the managers, deserted the company on Fennell's approach, and went to New York, where he had friends who he knew would applaud the genius that was later to become great.[48] The managers had more trouble when Fennell grew capricious, and the theatre had to be closed from February 19 to 26 while he settled down.[49] (The tragedian himself said later that "Prudence . . . has always been with regard to me, so shy a goddess, that she never permitted me to touch

[44] Durang, XXXIII, Series 1.

[45] See, e. g., *Aurora,* Dec. 15, 1797. Bernard has left in his *Retrospections of America, 1797–1811,* N. Y., 1887, good accounts of other members of the company, as well as himself. His *Retrospections of the Stage,* 2 vols., London, 1830, is interesting for his life in England.

[46] See Fennell's *Apology,* 357, and the *Gazette of the United States,* Dec. 12, 1796, to April 11, 1797.

[47] *Gazette of the United States,* Jan. 4, 1798.

[48] See Dunlap, 214–221. Cooper was under contract to Wignell and Reinagle with a £500 forfeit; they forbade his New York appearance; he appeared anyway; when he returned to Philadelphia he was arrested; and his further history during the century belongs to New York. See Odell, II, 12, *et seq.*

[49] See Dunlap, 219–220, for the managers' statement.

the hem of her garment." [50] On April 2, the company lost John Pollard Moreton, who died of consumption and was buried from his house at 39 South Front Street.[51]

One of the most interesting events of the season came on April 25, when Gilbert Fox introduced for his benefit a new song written by Joseph Hopkinson—"Hail Columbia." "Hail Columbia" served a dual purpose. It filled the house for Mr. Fox's benefit, and it gave the Federalists words for their party tune, "The President's March," allowing them to compete on even terms in the current battle of music with the Republicans' *"Ça Ira."* Mr. Fox sang "Hail Columbia" to the accompaniment of a full band and a "grand chorous," brought the audience of the New Theatre cheering to its feet, and established the Federalist song in popular favor.[52]

Twelve new plays appeared this season, none very important; Mrs. Inchbald's *Wives as They Were* was given six times. It is significant that there were ten more new afterpieces than new plays. But a number of excellent plays reappeared: for example, *Lear, Othello, Hamlet, Henry IV, Venice Preserved,* and *The School for Scandal.*

THE LAST YEAR OF THE CENTURY

The yellow fever of 1798 prevented the New Theatre from being opened again till February 5, 1799. Ricketts' Circus started up a few weeks earlier, its dramatic season, comprising the usual new pantomimes and spectacles, extending to March 23.

On the first night of the season at the New Theatre from February 5 to May 27, 1799, William B. Wood, later an excellent comedian and the manager of the theatre, made his inauspicious entry on the Philadelphia stage.[53] Strong in comedy, with John Bernard at his best, the company was badly crippled in tragedy (Fennell was gone again, Cooper had deserted, Moreton was dead), and there was no one to play opposite Mrs. Merry in the great tragic rôles. As a consequence, the

[50] *Apology,* 340.

[51] *Gazette of the U. S.,* Apr. 2, 3, 1798.

[52] For a fuller account, see Burton Alva Konkle, *Joseph Hopkinson,* Phila., U. of Pa. Press, 1931.

[53] See his *Personal Recollections of the Stage,* Philadelphia, 1855, pp. 50–51, for his own account. He had not quite remembered the date: it was Feb. 5, 1799, not "December, 1798."

season was devoted to comedy, opera, and pantomime, and the fourteen new plays were nearly all comedies or Gothic mysteries. A young tragedian, Alexander Cain, was secured late in the season. ("Poor Cain," Durang lamented later, "with clever qualities and goodly prospects, was the author of his own mishaps. In juvenile tragedy he promised much excellence." [54]) Though at first announced (May 11) to make his début as Hamlet, he appeared first as Tancred to Mrs. Merry's Sigismunda, and was a success.

Earlier in the season Wignell had taken the dangerous step of attacking the newspapers, especially the *Philadelphia Gazette,* which had not been gentle in its criticisms.[55] That paper, hearing that "A new dramatic *trifle,* entitled 'RETALIATION, or A peg at the Printers,' is shortly to be brought forward at the New Theatre," advised:

> Good Tommy Wignell, don't attack the printers!
> As well might *drunkards* be revil'd by *vintners!*
> Believe me, friend, in spite of all your witticisms,
> They'll bear too hard upon you by their criticisms.
> 'Tis they can raise a player and a poet—
> You're wrong, believe me, and they'll let you know it.[56]
>
> Q

There is no record that *A Peg at the Printers* was enjoyed.

In 1798 Lailson's Circus had crashed down, and on December 17, 1799, Ricketts' Pantheon, which had begun its season on November 27, burned up. The spectacular pantomime of *Don Juan* had been announced, and the last scene, representing "the Infernal Regions with a view of the mouth of Hell," had been promised in realistic detail. The truth seems to be that the burning of the Pantheon had nothing to do with Don Juan's punishment, but the public was hard to convince.

The season at the New Theatre from December 4, 1799, to May 19, 1800, was just beginning when the nineteenth century, which ends the present record, came in. No important changes in the company had occurred over the summer. John Bernard was still the leading comedian, with Warren second only to him, and young Cain was again Tancred to Mrs. Merry's Sigismunda.

[54] Chap. XXXI, Series 1.
[55] See, e. g., *Phila. Gazette,* Feb. 11, 26, 1799.
[56] February 23, 1799.

RETROSPECT

So by the end of the eighteenth century the Philadelphia stage had, after many decades of growth, achieved the vigor of manhood. Our knowledge of the first half of the century is cloudy, obscured by the fact that the newspapers, the first not appearing till 1719, gave almost no local news. But we know that from 1700 on there was strong opposition to the stage, expressed during the first two decades by repeated prohibitions. From an old letter we learn that strolling comedians were in town in 1723, and were patronized by the governor of the state. An advertisement in the next year tells of a theatre, "The New Booth on Society Hill." Then for a quarter of a century longer there is silence, broken only by the barkers for marionettes and a "magick lanthorn" show, till in 1749–50 a few whispers reveal that the Murray and Kean players, perhaps from the West Indies, were playing at Plumsted's warehouse in Water Street.

In 1754 Hallam's adventurous Comedians from London came to the city, and in 1759 David Douglass built the Theatre on Society Hill, and seven years later the Theatre in Southwark, which was to remain the most important theatre in the city for more than twenty-five years. Hallam's troupe had become the nucleus of the American Company, which, led by David Douglass, strolled along the Atlantic seaboard till the Revolution, with Philadelphia furnishing its most dependable audience. When the American Company was in Philadelphia, the Theatre in Southwark was open three nights a week, with a change of bill every night. The repertory included many of the best Shakespearean, Restoration, and early eighteenth century plays, and after each main play the entertainment was rounded out with an afterpiece of farce, pantomime, or ballad-opera. There were few purely American dramas to be seen during the century; only one, Godfrey's *The Prince of Parthia,* was produced in colonial Philadelphia.

In 1778, during the Revolution, the British officers gave plays at the Theatre in Southwark, as the American officers did at Valley Forge, and probably also at the Southwark. A law against plays which was passed in 1779 remained on the statute books for ten years, and made a great deal of trouble. When the actors returned after the war, they reopened the Theatre in Southwark, evaded the law by disguising plays as operas or moral lectures, and were patronized by the best people in

the city, including George Washington. Various efforts to repeal the prohibition failed till, in 1789, civic consciousness was at last thoroughly aroused, and a Dramatic Association formed which struck the law from the books.

In the last decade of the century the city outgrew the historic old Theatre in Southwark, and built the New Theatre in Chesnut Street, a spacious and excellent house, for which an admirable company was imported *en masse* from England. Dozens and scores of the best British plays were given every season, with operas and pantomimes, and new American plays as they were written. The growing taste for spectacle led to the building of two pantomimic-circuses, Ricketts' Art Pantheon and Lailson's Circus, both soon accidentally destroyed. So as the eighteenth century closed, the excellent New Theatre in Chesnut Street stood alone in Philadelphia, at the head of the American stage.

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